

ADAM

FACT • FICTION • HUMOR

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DECEMBER, 1963

TO RIDE A TIGER
-page 30





ADAM

DECEMBER, 1963 • VOL 36, No 1

CONTENTS:

FACT:

Island Of Banished Blondes	6
Yankee Buccaneer	10
Pedal Till You Drop	14
The Rustled Redhead	26

FICTION:

The Joker	4
Double-Cross The Dealer	22
To Ride A Tiger	30
Saddle Job	36

FEATURES:

Pin-Ups	3
Life Is Never Dull	20-21
Cartoons: 8, 9, 12, 13, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 47, 48.	

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THE JOKER

IT was just after noon on a hot Saturday. There were 10 minutes to go before the first race.

In the corner hotel the barman turned up the radio to a deafening blare. A tall man leaning on the bar winced, finished his beer and left. He paused awhile under the veranda and watched a police car cruise slowly down the street, its two occupants relaxed and seemingly disinterested in anything except keeping cool. He saw the car make a turn, then he walked in the opposite direction down the shady side of the street.

Two blocks further on he was in an area that looked to be composed mainly of fruit shops and cafes. Groups of arm-waving Mediterraneans blocked the pavement, but the Tall Man meekly stepped in the gutter and walked round them without being noticed. At the next corner he found an

alley which led behind the shops. Counting buildings, he came to a broken-down pair of double gates in a high wooden fence. He stood there listening.

There was a distant hum of traffic from the main street, the start of a race broadcast coming through a nearby open window, but he could hear nothing from the other side of the fence.

He pushed lightly against the gates — they held. Sticking out from the top of one of them was a short rod. The Tall Man tried moving it to one side . . . there was a click and the doors moved inwards about an inch. He waited again, then gently eased the right hand door open. It moved a foot or two on sagging hinges, then caught on the ground. The Tall Man went sideways through the opening into a backyard piled high with crates and perfumed with

rotting vegetables.

As he came forward he moved into a shaft of brilliant sunshine that caught him like a spotlight and held him as he looked around.

To his left was a dilapidated shed, to his right a crumbling brick wall. In front, partly obscured by boxes, was a window.

Making no noise he stepped toward the partly open door of the shed and looked inside. Before his eyes adjusted to the dimness, he heard a scratching sound inside the shed. Instantly he became wary. Then he could see into the shed and he put his left hand on the door to open it wider.

At that moment the relative quiet of the yard was shattered. The Tall Man turned round.

A short, dark, fat man rushed from the house with a sort of waddling trot. To his own accompaniment of hoarse battle cries,



FICTION • ALBERT VANN

The tall man, in his sweat-stained clothes, dusty shoes and battered hat, was a cool, cool character. He played his cards right . . .

he seemed about to hurl himself upon his visitor. At the last moment he changed his tactics by braking to a grinding halt, starting to jump up and down on one spot and playing with an invisible yo-yo.

He was rapidly coming to a boil and the Tall Man was faintly alarmed. He looked down from his great height at the bouncing one, folded his arms and said disapprovingly, "Simmer down, sport! It's too hot for that kind of exercise."

This piece of well-meaning advice infuriated the apoplectic one even more — if such a thing was possible. He seemed about to reach the top blowing stage and attack. But the sight of a pair of massive, cane-cutting and shearing-shed-developed forearms, a few inches from his eyes, kept him from crossing the borderline. Or maybe it

was because the fires that were consuming him were burning low from lack of oxygen. At least, the strangling sounds he was making suggested this. Indeed, since his sudden arrival on the scene, his mouth noises had conveyed no intelligence whatsoever. His eyes, which had bulged forward with the pressure behind them, retreated back into his skull. He subsided from near insanity to mere fury and struggled to say a word or two.

"Wadda you want? Wadda you want? Wadda you do here, eh? You steal from me!"

The Tall Man smiled fondly down at his accuser. It was a smile that suggested that here existed a simple misunderstanding — a mistaken assumption that could be corrected if only they got together like gentlemen and straightened things out.

The fat one didn't want to straighten anything out. He'd caught a thief, and this thief, instead of cowering before his righteous anger, had smiled fondly at him. According to his standards this intruder should be taking off for the hills before the law arrived. He should be trying to escape, not grinning like an idiot.

He was somewhat confused and then gradually he became aware of the size of the Tall Man. A new emotion that tasted like fear was slowly developing in him.

He retreated a few yards toward the house and screamed over his shoulder to someone inside.

The only word the Tall Man could understand was something that sounded like police.

There was an answering scream from the house and then all was quiet again.

(Continued on page 44)

ISLAND OF BANISHED BLONDES

FACT • NEIL TURNBULL

It was a paradise on earth to all men — but it was a two-edged one with more trouble per-square-girl than any South Seas adventurer ever encountered.

"THERE it is!" Ivor Cargell, sitting in the prow of the outrigger canoe shouted. "Dead ahead."

Robert Wyatt's gaze followed the big Englishman's outstretched arm. Miles away across the dirty green waters of the Pacific a dark hump broke the straight line of the horizon. Cargell swivelled around, a triumphant grin on his gnarled, sunburned, red-bearded features. His eyes wrinkled happily.

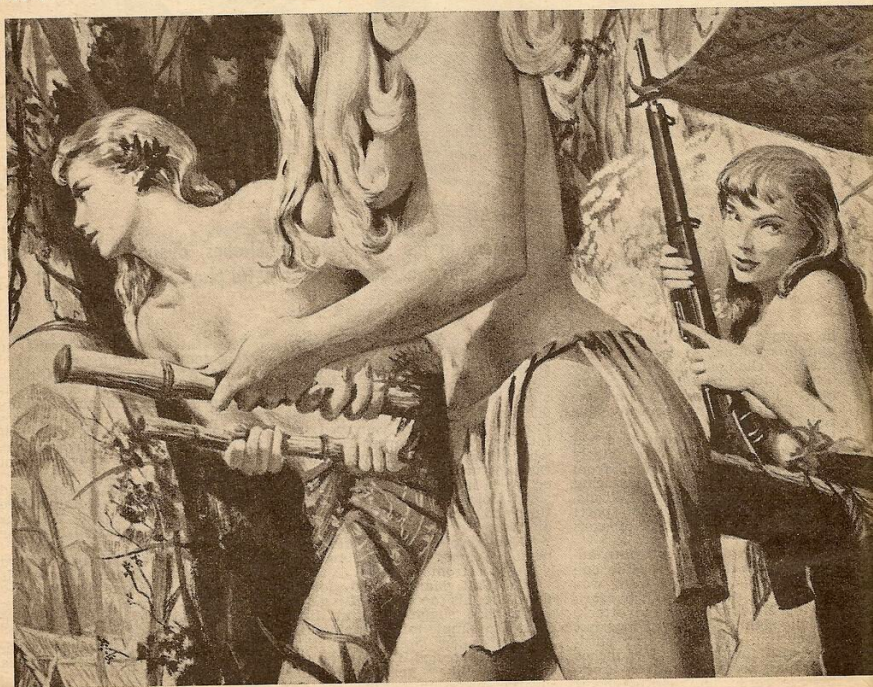
"Just another island," Wyatt grunted. "There are about 500 in the Sulu Archipelago and they all look exactly like that one. How can you be sure it's Onahiu from this distance?"

"Damn it. I spent two years here! I know every inch of these waters."

Wyatt, a stocky, 33-year-old American with a battered, homely face, wanted to believe the other man. For two months he and Cargell had been working

their way down the archipelago — a long, broken chain of islands between the Philippines and Borneo in the outrigger they had stolen after their escape from Sibuko Prison on Mindanao. Wyatt had been serving 20 years for gun-running — Cargell, a life sentence for murder.

Until the start of this insane voyage, Wyatt had considered the year he had spent in Sibuko to be the worst experience of his life. But it had been nothing



compared to the ordeal of crossing 300 miles of ocean in a craft designed for coastal waters. Except for occasional stops at unpopulated islands, where they had searched — often without success — for food and fresh water, the entire time had been spent on the open sea. Three times they had been caught in heavy rain-squalls that had buffeted the outrigger around like a lily pad in a whirlpool, when all they could do was haul down the sail, crouch in the bottom of the boat and hope they wouldn't be swamped. Just as bad had been the endless sun-battered days when the wind died and the sail was useless.

Only Cargell's constantly repeated stories about Oahu, their goal, had kept Wyatt going. The hell of it was he had never more than half-believed the Englishman. Rationally, it all seemed incredible — an island populated by a small band of women, descended from members of a doomed Swedish colony set up in the archipelago almost a century before, their men killed off in battle with native raiders from the North Borneo mainland . . . He had entrusted his life to what might be a fantasy in a madman's brain, knowing from the very beginning that Cargell was unbalanced . . .

Then Cargell's apelike arms

were wielding a paddle and the canoe shot forward. Caught up, despite himself, in the Englishman's excitement, Wyatt also began paddling. *Maybe it's true after all*, he thought. *Maybe it is*.

Half an hour later, he could make out a greyish beach, composed of the mixture of sand and volcanic rock common to this region — beyond it, a wall of cocoa palms, green, heavily wooded hills. Then, several hundred yards ahead, he saw the white-flecked, irregular band of water that invariably marked a coral reef. He shouted out a warning to Cargell.

"Just keep paddling!" the Englishman yelled back. "There's a passage. I've crossed it a hundred times."

Stomach muscles tense, Wyatt waited for the impact of jagged coral scraping through the bottom of the canoe. Once again he cursed himself for coming with Cargell. "I'm as crazy as he is," he muttered.

Then, miraculously, they swept over the reef, were caught up in gentle surf. And, for the first time, he really believed that the other man knew what he was doing. It wasn't just a dream!

Wyatt got further confirmation — of a kind he hadn't expected — after they had leaped from the

outrigger and started dragging it up on the beach. Suddenly he heard a shot, the whistle of a bullet past his ear. Letting go of the boat, he and Cargell turned together.

The American caught his breath at the sight of the girl who stepped out of the brush, resting a smoking rifle on one of her swelling hips. He had never seen anything like her. Almost six feet tall, she couldn't have been more than 25 years old. His gaze moved over her long, perfectly shaped legs, past the skimpy loincloth she wore to the naked mounds of her breasts, only partially covered by long, pale blonde hair. Her strong but completely feminine features were contorted with anger.

Abruptly, the alarm faded from Cargell's blue-white eyes. "Elke!" he exclaimed in joyous relief. "You remember me. I'm back!" "Cargell," the girl replied. However, she didn't lower the rifle. "Yes, I remember you. And who is the other?"

"A friend of mine — Robert Wyatt. He can be trusted."

Slowly, amusement replaced her look of anger. "Perhaps—but I do not think that you can be. Both of you get back in your boat. If you aren't beyond the reef again in three minutes, I'll kill you."





"Well, let's take a cab then . . . I can't walk without wiggling!"

"I don't understand," Cargell said in a dazed voice.

"You are not wanted here."

A sick feeling rising from the pit of his stomach, Wyatt realised that the girl meant what she said. Her finger was visibly trembling on the rifle's trigger. *All for nothing*, he thought in despair. *Two months of hell for nothing.*

"I don't understand," Cargell said again. "Let me speak to Mai. Or Leah. Anyone. I was your friend. I lived among you, taught you English. I don't understand."

"Back," she snarled. "Back to the sharks, where you belong."

Still stunned, Cargell and Wyatt turned and began pushing the outrigger clear of the breaking waves. Minutes later, they were on the open sea, beyond the range of Elke's rifle. Cargell dropped his paddle into the bottom of the boat, met Wyatt's hate-filled glance.

"All for nothing," the American

said aloud . . .

The incident that started Robert Henry Wyatt on his way to Onahiu had occurred a year and a half earlier in the Philippines. A native of Durham, North Carolina, Wyatt had gone to sea in his late teens, rose from deck-hand to captain in less than 10 years. Eventually, simple greed had brought him to the Far East, where, in the late 19th century, a seaman with sparse scruples and any kind of ship under his feet could still make a fortune without too much capital. With his life savings, he bought a small sailing schooner, hired on a Malayan crew and searched for a cargo.

He found his first in Hong Kong — a load of Austrian rifles for the Philippine Nationalist insurrectionists then struggling to throw off their Spanish rulers. The voyage proved so profitable, he sneaked 12 more loads of armaments to the rebels during the next three months, building up a 40,000 dollar account in the Hong Kong Merchants Bank.

There's no reason, he thought, why I can't make half a million bucks before I'm through . . .

As it turned out, there was an excellent reason — a salvo from the Spanish gunboat that blew his schooner out of the water while he and his men were unloading guns in an isolated lagoon 30 miles north of Manila. Cut off from the open sea, all he could do was splash ashore, take cover and watch his ship being turned into a splintered, blazing hulk.

An army patrol found Wyatt and his four crewmen hiding in a field of *sawale* grass the next morning. His attempt to bribe the Spanish soldiers with the money he had been paid for the guns failed.

Less than a month later, sentenced to 20 years for sedition, Wyatt entered Sibuko prison on Mindanao. Unlike Luzon, the main island to the north, Mindanao was a virtual wilderness, its inland population of Moro bandits and pirates still unconquered by the Spanish. Except for a few fields of tobacco and hemp worked by convict labor, there was nothing around the prison except sea and steaming jungle. The nearest settlement was a tiny fishing village 10 miles to the south.

Sibuko lived up to everything he had heard about Spanish jails — 16-hour work days in the fields, starvation rations of rice and bean sprouts, the dysentery and other chronic diseases that came with malnutrition. Even worse, in his case, was the personal isolation. He shared a cell with six sullen natives but none of them knew English or showed any urge to learn.

In later years, Wyatt decided that if it hadn't been for the preceding months of loneliness, his friendship with Ivor Cargell never would have developed. He had been in Sibuko nearly a year when the stooped, huge-shouldered Englishman was thrust into the cell. The man looked around warily, his blue-white eyes flicking from one Oriental face to another, as if he expected to be attacked. His gaze halted when it came to Wyatt. "English?" he asked in his booming growl of a voice.

"American," Wyatt answered hoarsely.

"Well, you might have been Dutch," Cargell sighed.

"What are you in for?" Wyatt inquired when they had exchanged introductions.

"You know what the Malaysians call an *amok*?" Cargell said with quiet pride.

Wyatt blinked. An *amok* was a man who killed without reason, literally a human devil running wild in homicidal rage.

"That's what they called me," Cargell said matter-of-factly. "I killed three Filipinos in Baguio. Bashed in one's head with an ivory-handled umbrella, finished the others with my fists. Bloodiest mess you ever saw. Spaniards would have hung me if I hadn't

been a white man. Not true, though, the part about my being crazy. The three lice tried to rob me. Couldn't get anybody to believe it. Damned Spaniards are worse than the Dutch . . ."

Wyatt soon learned a lot more about Ivor Cargell but believed less than half of it. Cargell claimed to be the disinherited youngest son of a baronet, a marine biologist with several important scientific discoveries to his credit and the ex-wrestling champion of Cambridge University. "Came east in '86," he concluded. "Trying to find a species of plankton suitable for human consumption. Cheapest and most plentiful food in the world once you've licked the poison problem . . ."

About a month later, Cargell mentioned Onahiu for the first time. "It's southwest of here, about 300 miles away. One of the Tawitawi group in the Sulu Archipelago. Spent two years there, then got restless and headed for the Philippines. Worst mistake I ever made. I'm going back as soon as I get out of here."

Aware that Cargell was serving a life sentence with no hope of parole, Wyatt remained silent for a moment. "What's so great about Onahiu?" he asked at last.

"The women. All young and most of them blonde. I was the only man there. Forgot about my plankton hunting after a while." Noticing the American's dubious expression, Cargell said, "You must have heard of the Borkman colony. Everyone has."

Wyatt searched his memory. Eventually he recalled stories about a shipload of Swedes who had established a settlement on the island of Jolo, between Mindanao and Borneo, early in the century. They had been members of a crackpot philosophical sect seeking a new Eden in the Pacific. Instead they had found malaria, dengue fever and headhunters.

"That bunch was killed off 50 years ago."

"As an organised colony," Cargell said, "but their descendants — some of them almost pure Scandinavian — are scattered through the islands. This particular group settled on Onahiu."

"And what happened to the men?"

"Seven years ago the island was attacked by natives from the Borneo mainland. Members of the Kawali tribe — a branch of the Dayaks but without their fear of long trips across open sea. When a lookout spotted the beggars landing, the Onahiu men sent the women and children into the hills to hide. They came back the next day to find the village looted and their men slaughtered. Apparently the Kawalis suffered such heavy losses in the fighting that they didn't hang around to hunt for the women."

Oddly, they never talked of escape. When a chance to flee did come — late on a September afternoon — it took them and everyone else completely by surprise. He and Cargell were part of a

15-man gang planting new tobacco in the prison's sprawling south field, less than a hundred yards from the green wall of the jungle. Suddenly one of their two Spanish guards toppled over soundlessly, a 10-inch crossbow shaft sticking out of his back. "Bajete!" the other guard shouted. "Get down!" The prisoners were already on their bellies, instantly realising what had happened. It wasn't the first time that one of the jungle-dwelling Moros, who hated the Spanish, had taken a casual pot-shot at a uniformed guard.

Panicking, the surviving guard wildly squeezed off rifle shots into the trees where the crossbowman must be lurking. Abruptly Wyatt realised that Cargell, sprawling beside him in the dirt, was counting the reports.

"... seven," Cargell said huskily. "That's it — the last bullet in his magazine." Gripping the hoe with which he had been working, the giant Englishman lumbered erect and ran toward the guard.

"Don't!" Wyatt yelled after him but it was already too late. With a guttural, bloodlusting howl, Cargell swung the hoe. The dull blade slammed into the side of the Spaniard's neck, cutting off his terrified scream.

Then he and Cargell were running toward the jungle. The frenzied headlong flight didn't end until nearly half an hour later, when Wyatt crumpled to his knees in exhaustion. Cargell flopped down a few feet away, noisily sucking air into his aching lungs.

"Hell!" Wyatt gasped, "what got into you?"

Cargell bared his blunt yellow teeth in a grin. "You didn't have to come along."

"We're done for, you know. No one's ever gotten away from Sibuko. There's just no place to go in this wilderness."

"Onahiu. We'll go to Onahiu. It's only 300 miles away, maybe a little less . . ."

(Continued on page 48)



CRENSHAW

YANKEE BUCCANEER

Frederick Townsend Ward nearly became Emperor of all China. A memorial shrine in the holy city of Sun-Kiang marks the tomb of a TNT-fisted adventurer who arrived in China without even a shirt on his back.

THE mate bounced from one rail of the hatchway to the other pulling himself topside, hand over hand, against the wild plunging of the clipper ship. A giant wave broke across mid-deck, hitting him full, almost washing him back down below. A cracking, louder than cannonfire, came from overhead. He dashed salt water from his eyes, blinked, and saw the huge canvas sails, still rigged, whipping madly in the fierce blast of a full-blown summer squall. He could see dimly through the rain and spray that the captain was on the bridge, fighting desperately at the helm. Suddenly the sails caught a terrific gust, the deck fell out from under the mate's feet as the clipper heeled over sickeningly. He grabbed desperately for a line, hung on, stared straight down over the side at the lashing sea.

Another crazy blast took her by the sails, hurled the ship and the mate hard in the opposite direction. "Take in canvas!" the mate screamed, getting his feet untangled and lurching toward the bridge. He could hear the skipper bellowing the same command above the howling fury of the East China Sea, but the crew made no move to obey. Some of them had lashed themselves to masts and rigging. Some clung to ropes. Others disappeared quickly down hatchways. No one climbed the three 150-foot masts to haul in canvas and secure the clipper ship against the violent winds.

"Aloft!" he roared. "Take in sail. We'll capsize!"

The skipper's eyes, when the mate got close enough to see them, were fixed straight ahead with the glassy blankness of a

captain prepared to go down with his ship. Frederick Townsend Ward, first mate out of Salem, Massachusetts, took command. He risked a mad sprint across the sea-swept deck to the cook's galley, ducked below, came up with a blazing torch. The crew members watched him run to the powder locker, saw him smash it open and spin out a keg of explosives. Bracing his legs around the wooden drum, the mate broke the head in with a swift punch of the torch butt. He lowered the flame to the exposed powder. His wet face glistened in the red glow, his flashing eyes held the crew like magnets. "Haul canvas, damn you, or I'll blow you to hell!"

They climbed, terror stricken, into the rigging, feet and hands clawing for support in the dangerous ascent, faces white and taut. Above them, death was possible, below, it was a certainty. The torch still burned, the mate still glared up at them.

Sail by sail, they dragged the canvas to the masts and lashed it tight. The clipper, buffeted now by the sea alone and not the wind, cleaved her 2000 tons cleanly into the wave mountains, steadying herself as the men scampered down from high rigging. First Mate Ward finally reached the bridge. The captain, a man back from the dead, thanked his mate with a grateful glance. "You'll get master's papers when we return to San Francisco," he yelled.

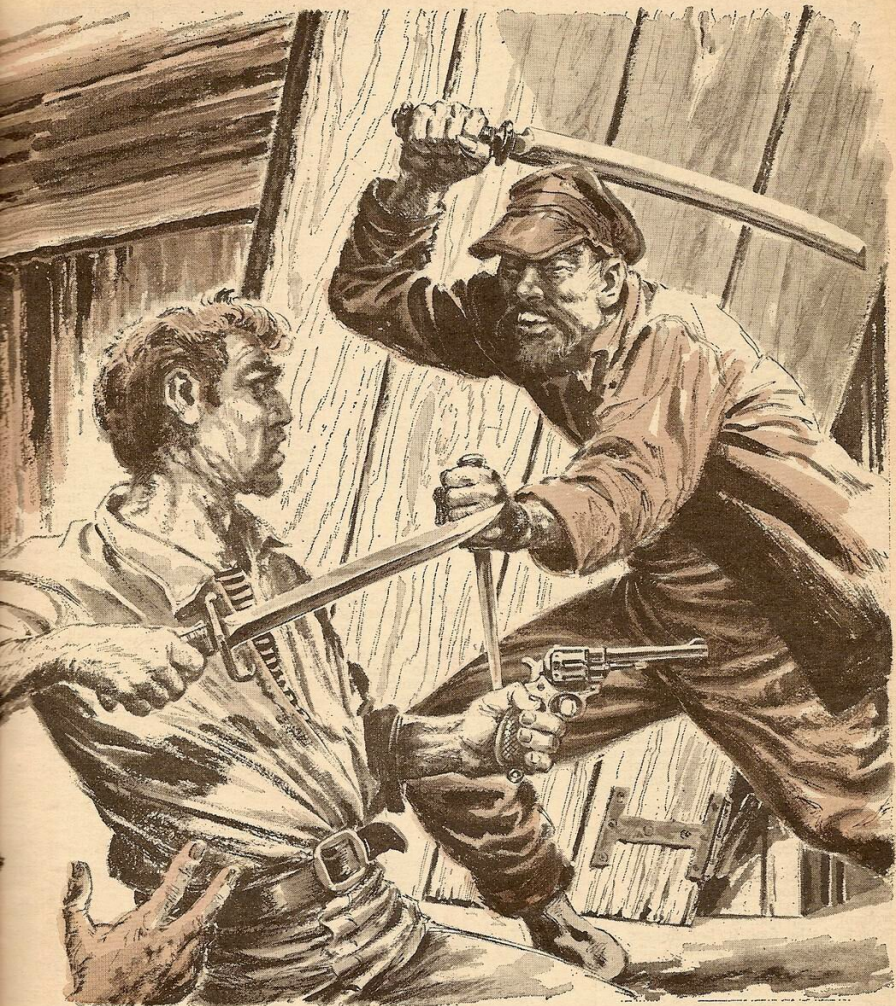
"Not me," Ward shouted. "I'm not going back."

Fred Ward had arrived at the East China Sea, gateway to Shanghai, by way of the long, indirect road from Massachusetts.



He had sailed before the mast in his teens, earned a mate's rating, then left the sea to fight as professional soldier in five South American revolutions and as a volunteer with the French in the Crimean War. His latest scrap had been a small guerilla action in a remote part of Mexico.

At a time when other adventurous Americans were pushing through Indian territory to stake homesteads and hunt gold, Ward forked a mule, crossed the Mexican Sierra Madre, the jungles and the deserts to arrive, flat



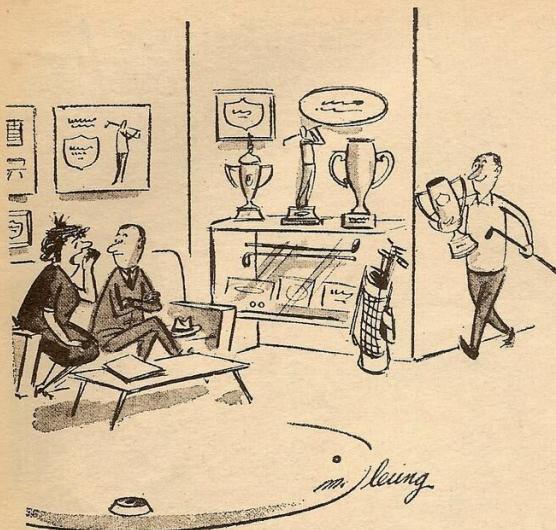
broke, in the hustling young city of San Francisco. Instead of heading into the hills after the big bonanza, Ward sought a berth on a clipper carrying cargo or passengers to the Orient. Prospectors he came to know jeered that he was reluctant to face the world's most ferocious warrior, the Indian. Ward smiled his cold smile and in that bleak moment his hecklers saw horrible images of many dead left on countless battlefields. "The redskin only defends his home," Ward told them. "I prefer to fight on the

side of the underdog."

Leaving the others to search for fortunes in ore and beef, Ward embarked on the clipper *Red Jacket*, bound for China in search of a fight. Travelling on the same ship with Ward were several Chinese merchants, two English importers, an Oriental lady of evident means and her retinue of servants, which included a pair of Russian maids. Ward had found the Russian women interesting. After the squall blew itself out and he and the skipper navigated *Red Jacket* back on to course, he

decided to go below to check the passenger cabins.

The mate was not the most attractive male the Oriental lady had ever seen. She opened the cabin door herself and studied the visitor through slanted, half-closed eyes. He was not tall—the two Russian maids who came to stand beside the Chinese lady topped him by an inch or more. Nor was his build spectacular or his face handsome. Yet there was something in the trim compactness of Ward that suggested graceful strength, and the air of healthy



"Remember, dear . . . don't mention golf."

vitality on his tanned face and in his blue eyes.

"Everything all right in here?" Ward asked. In his direct way he appraised them, not concerned with wealth or nationality but only with physical charm.

The Chinese lady smiled. "I am Sali Tsung. In San Francisco my American friends call me Sally. Would you care for a tea or wine? I fear that like all women we are upset by storms. The presence of a ship's officer would be most comforting."

"Wine," Ward said. He crossed the cabin and took a seat she waved him into. The Chinese woman sat down opposite him at a small table. A maid walked to either side of his chair — they stood much too close and with a lack of servile courtesy. The woman, Sali, poured wine into a goblet. As he took it, her fingers touch his with casual warmth and his forearm rubbed along the hip of a maid who deliberately pressed forward. The contact was pleasant, a fact which the Chinese lady read on his face.

"It has been a long voyage," she said. "The girls are nervous. You must be weary. My observations are that the captain—well, is lax. You have been this ship's true master."

Ward shrugged, to find his shoulders moving against smooth silks. The maids were leaning over him now. One girl took his goblet from the table and held it to his lips while he drank. The other unbuttoned the tight collar of his tunic and opened his shirt. Warm hands began a gentle massage of his neck and shoulder

muscles. The first girl set down his glass, completed unfastening his shirt, worked her hands softly over his chest, deep to the flat planes of his abdomen. "You have earned relaxation," the Chinese woman murmured, her voice light with amusement. "I must go to the bridge and check our position. Please wait here for my return."

Ward didn't answer. His shirt and tunic were completely off now, his shoulders no longer

pressed into sleek silk but into soft, naked flesh. The maids had dropped their robes to the floor. He didn't hear the Chinese woman leave, or the door close, or the key turn in the lock. It was hours before Ward was aware of anything but the Russian girls, and then it took a blasting explosion to jolt him out of their spell. He shook off clinging hands, rushed to a porthole, and saw that half a dozen sampans had been tied to the clipper ship. The tiny boats were empty, but three big Chinese junks were coming alongside.

"What the hell is this?" Ward yelled, and lunged for the door.

The Russian girls nonchalantly drew on their robes as he heaved and pulled with all his might on the knob. The door opened—Ward suddenly spilled across the state-room. Sali, the Chinese lady, stood there, holding a six-barrelled derringer. Back of her, three stalwart China boys shoved bayoneted muskets warningly at Ward.

"You will stay here with the girls," Sali told him. "Try to set foot outside this cabin and these soldiers will kill you."

The door closed, the lock clicked. The Russian maids giggled. Ward swung around to find that the silk robes were on the floor again. Overhead, he could hear sounds on the deck, banging and scraping. From the forward hold, not too far away, came the binding whine of a winch. *Red Jacket's* cargo was being pirated. The Chinese lady, Ward realised, had been planted on the clipper to clear the way for the boarding party. And she had tricked him neatly with her pair of buxom beauties.

Ward got to the deck as the last of the sampans pushed off. He found the skipper flushed and excited. The hold hatches were open. "What the hell were we carrying?" Ward said.



"You don't have to go back to your mother. I'll go back to my wife!"

"Dynamite," the captain said. "TNT, and a shipment of surplus military rifles — obsolete weapons and ammunition for them — plus some foodstuffs, clothing, medicines."

The skipper explained that they were about 40 miles offshore when a group of sampans swept out of the dusk toward them. He had sounded an alarm and summoned the first mate, but Ward was off duty and no one could locate him. The sampans quickly encircled *Red Jacket*. Someone on one sampan hurled an earthen jug toward the clipper's bow. It fell short, but showered the deck with water as it exploded.

"Jug filled with explosives," the captain said. "I've heard of them before. With a dozen sampans ringing us, all armed with crocks, there was nothing to do but order a full stop."

Red Jacket had then been boarded by musket-carrying Chinese. A small fleet of junks — sturdy, single-sail vessels — had emerged from a low-hanging cloud bank and in a matter of 20 minutes the clipper's cargo was being transferred to the junks. Two of the mainsails were slashed to ribbons. "That Chinese 'lady' came on deck and engineered the whole thing," the captain said bitterly. "And where were you, Mr Ward?"

"That Chinese 'lady' engineered me, too," Ward said. "The sea is calm. We should be able to limp into port — but it will be too late to do anything about the pirates."

The remaining sail was rigged and a course set. Catching only a limited amount of breeze with her canvas, the heavy clipper crawled into the waves toward Shanghai. It was dawn before they came within sight of land. The captain summoned Mate Ward to the bridge. "Put your glass on those hills west of Shanghai," he said. "There's the reason we were boarded."

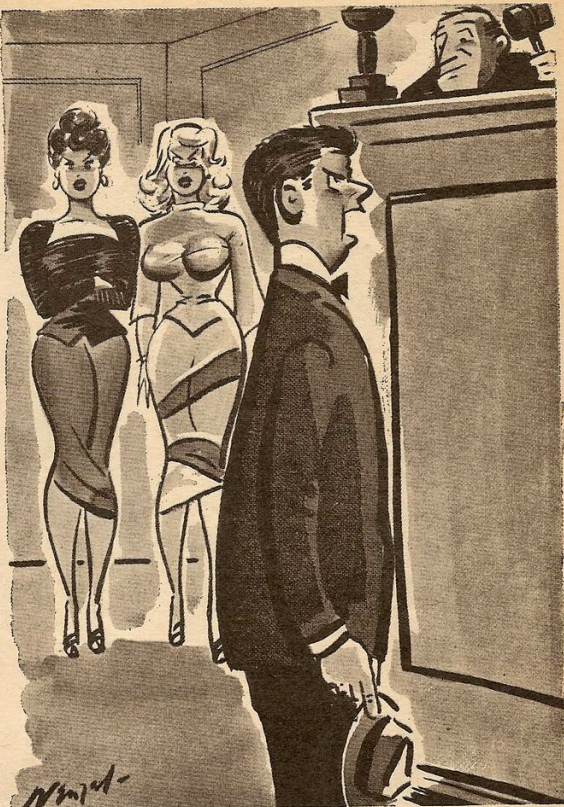
Ward opened his glass and through the powerful lens saw a series of rolling hills; rising up from them were long rows of smoke columns. The sky was black. "That's the rebel army," the captain said. "Burning up farms and villages as they advance on Shanghai. The guns we lost last night could be in rebel hands now, helping that advance."

The mate remained silent as the skipper went on. "You stopped our mutiny cold, Mr Ward, but I doubt if even you could have prevented that piracy. I still intend to recommend you for master's papers. Best if you sail back with us — we'll be lucky to weigh anchor before the rebels move in."

"Thanks," Ward said, "but I plan to stay. This is the chance I've been waiting a lifetime for."

"Shanghai is lost," the captain warned him. "We'll carry back a full load of passengers — people trying to escape the rebels. Pass up a berth on *Red Jacket* and you may not get another ship out."

Ward collected his pay when



"I was forced into bigamy . . . one of them can't cook!"

they docked, and went ashore to prow the waterfront cafes of China's great port. He mingled with Oriental and foreign seamen, drank and talked with them — and listened. What he heard about the war intrigued Ward. The rebel forces called themselves 'Tai Pings, which in English meant Terrible Peaceful Rebels.

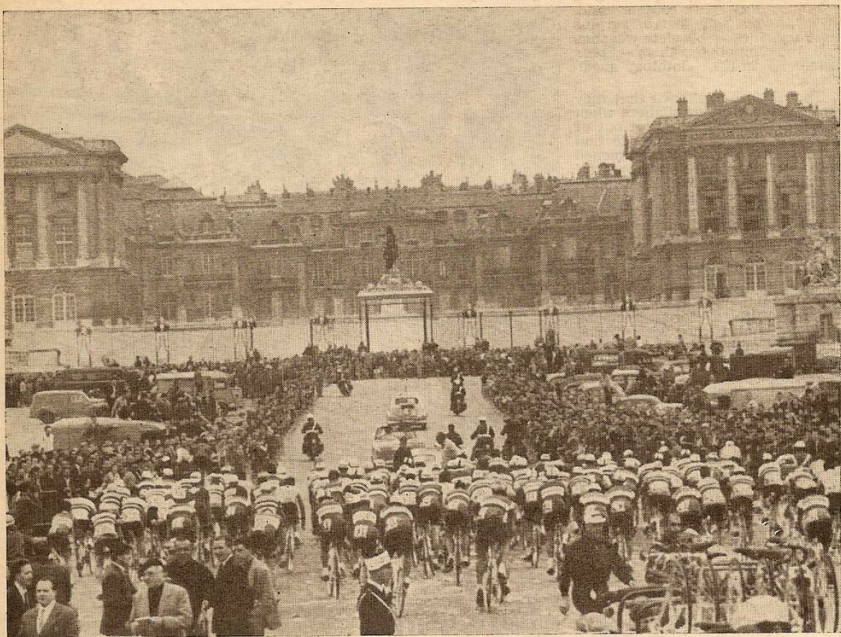
Their Christian-trained leader had proclaimed that he was the younger brother of Jesus, and had been ordained by his father, God, to drive the ruling Manchu dynasty out of China. His huge but inadequately armed battalions had routed the imperial troops in every engagement.

The Heavenly King — as the rebel leader called himself — had aimed his opening blows at cities along the Yang-tze River, taking Nanking, Tzeki and Sun-Kiang and moving steadily toward the sea. China's main port, Shanghai, was already cut off from the im-

perial capital of Peking, to the north. Most barroom predictions were that the Heavenly King would be inside Shanghai in two months. With this vital port in rebel control, all China would fall into his hands.

Fred Ward watched *Red Jacket* load up its frightened passengers and saw its billowing sails vanish below the horizon. He did not have enough cash left to buy passage on another ship. He began to look for a job, something that would take him inland to the fighting, not home. An American-owned company which traded up the Yang-tze River right into rebel held territory eagerly snapped up the first mate when he applied for a berth. They had a small steamer, a sidewheeler, but not enough crew for it. "We can get the goods and the rebels allow us to trade," the owner told Ward.

(Continued on page 53)



The start of the Tour de France outside the Chateau de Versailles. The race is one of the most grueling tests of courage and strength man has ever competed in.

PEDAL TILL YOU DROP

MORE than 100 riders bent low over their bikes, spines flat and parallel to the road, legs churning like white pistons, and wheels silver blurs in the afternoon sun. Sweating in the torrid July heat of southern France, their mounts hung open and they inhaled and exhaled like wheezing asthmatics. Their arms vibrated as they drove their bikes over the rough road; their faces were gaunt, and their lips drawn back from their teeth in the strain of grim effort.

They had been riding steadily for 11 days, had covered more than a thousand miles, and the race was hardly half over. Already the toll of the terrible Tour de France could be counted. Many of them kept pedalling, pushing on, while blood dripped down their legs.

There were gaps in the ranks of the riders now. Almost 150 men had started, slightly more than 100 remained. Who would drop out next? Who, when he fell, would get a broken back, his

Buttocks ground raw,
bodies bruised and bloodied,
they kept punishing themselves. It was 22 days of
torment.

SPORT •
WARREN J. SHANAHAN

leg snapped, his jaw fragmented, his face and skull splattered against a boulder? It had all happened before on the Tour.

The crowd on the road to Pau stood and screamed when the jammed riders appeared, tilting way over as they poured around a turn.

"Can you see who's in the lead?"

"No . . . wait! I think . . . Yes,

it's Pauwels, the Belgian!"

"Where's Van Looy?"
"Who cares? Where's Anquetil?"

A spectator put binoculars to his eyes. "Stand still, damn it," he cried irritably as he was jostled. "here's Anquetil — and the German, Rudi Altig is pushing him."

"Unbelievable! Let me see."

His binoculars were torn out of his hands in the excitement, an ingredient the Tour de France generates enough of to warrant innumerable police actions. Bar-room brawls start among spectators as they root on their favorites. A red hot *aficionado* — and their number is legion in bicycle-crazy Europe — believes himself honor bound to defend his choice with his blood and his body. More money is dropped gambling on the Tour than is spent in Las Vegas during a month. This is an international competition, and while the riders don't draw national lines, the spectators certainly do.

The cyclists stormed past in a

thunder-burst of applause. Pauwels, in the lead, pumped furiously, his huge thigh muscles bulging and his calves standing out like iron plates. Behind him in close pursuit was his countryman, the oxen rider 'Rik' Van Loov, now riding for the Italian team. Strung out in line were Jacques Anquetil — "Jaquet" to those who cheered him — and, alongside him, his teammate, Rudi Altig.

The stands . . . the ribbon . . . the lap finish line—they were just ahead. It required a tremendous spurt, an effort that wrenched a keening wail of a gasp out of the throats of the racers. Their legs were churns as they dug deeper and deeper into the toe clips, accelerating faster and faster, 45, 50 miles per hour. A pack of color blazing down the middle of the road bunched tight, the racers striving to pass each other.

They were massed toe to toe. Pedalling, jostling with their elbows, careening at dangerous speeds, those in the rear tried to find tiny holes and free their way through while the leaders cut in front and kept them back. A fighting log jam that clogged the road from side to side, they shoved in tighter and sped like a band of fear-stricken animals for the bright ribbon ahead.

In a blur, they crossed the finish line — the crowd surging to its feet, clapping and stamping until the wooden stands reverberated. "Pauwels!" they roared. "Pauwels did it!"

The muscled Belgian raised his hand in token of victory as he flashed across the line. His boulder of a jaw dropped open and he grinned. This win meant 500 dollars in his pocket for the one day's win, and there were many, many days left — 11 more of gruelling torture and torment.

While the Pyrenees town of Pau celebrated and rocked to boisterous shouts, a caravan of cars and trucks followed the wake of the bicycle riders. The racers couldn't celebrate; there was too much to do. Wounds had to be bathed and cleaned, ointment rubbed into the raw meat of saddle sores.

And rest! Rest quivering nerves, knotted muscles, nervous stomachs that rejected solid foods. Many of the racers were on their knees, throwing up. They had to baby their stomachs so that they could eat once more and regain strength.

Sleep was what they craved, but there was so much to do. Tomorrow was one of the mountain laps — the laps where men died in bone-snapping falls. Tomorrow would count for points toward the Grand Prix of the mountains with a small fortune waiting at the end.

Plans had to be formulated. Should I try to win the mountain laps? Or conserve my strength and energy for the final victory in Paris?

Frail Jacques Anquetil looked to the rugged Pyrenees and shook his head. He had decided long ago he was no mountain goat. Indeed, with his physique it seemed

a miracle he was still in the race; and he was husbanding every bit of strength he had left. This year he had passed up many lucrative races just to be fit for this one, but as he felt his arms and legs quivering every time he moved, as his hands fumbled from merely trying to hold a glass of water, he wondered if that one wisecracking sports writer hadn't been right—

When you see Jacques Anquetil at the beginning of a race, you want to make a hospital reservation for him."

Oh, all the sports writers knew well enough that 28-year-old Jacques Anquetil raced with his brains, and not sheer muscle power. He was the leader of his team, he made the decisions for them, and his decision was that none of them would wear themselves out in the mountains, killing themselves to be first on that gruelling lap. It was regrettable in a way because the public loved raw, blazing energy, such as shown by Rik Van Loov.

Rik looked up at the mountains and vowed to do his damndest. A hulk of a man, he had thighs like a rhinoceros and endless reserves of strength. Yet they had been seriously tried this past week and a half. That clever little Anquetil and his marvellous teammate, the German Rudi Altig, had been pushing him ever since the start of the race at Nancy, trying to sap him dry.

Well, they couldn't do it and tomorrow he'd show them why. He'd run them right off the course, get out in front, and stay there. Rik, the world champion, was a solitary battler anyway. He didn't like those damn team affairs and

had only promised to participate in this, his first Tour, because the promoter had given him a small fortune. Tomorrow, with his good post position, he'd start putting on the pressure, let everybody chase him . . .

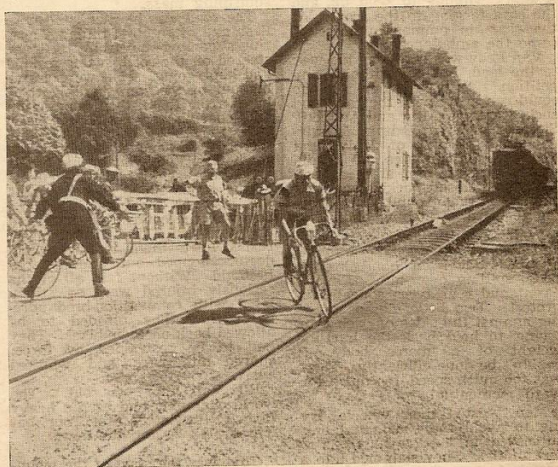
Morning brought the usual confusion. The racers checked their special Tour bicycles to make sure the mechanics had geared them properly. The bikes, of hollow aluminium, weigh only five pounds and have five forward gears. But by changing the sprocket on the rear wheel the racers can get five additional gears which are used solely for hill climbing.

Once everyone was satisfied as to the mechanical condition of the bikes, the aimless milling started. Officials ran around shouting orders, and everyone argued: managers, racers, mechanics, umpires, all in one solid screaming knot.

The Tour has races within races. It's business — big business — with 15 companies sponsoring teams of 10 men each. They have to cover 2650 miles in 22 days, at an average of better than 100 miles per day. There is the daily winner, the man who comes in first for the assigned lap. Then there is the time winner, the man who races against the clock.

To compound the confusion, the teams (named for their sponsors) race against each other. Here is where national boundaries are crossed, for a man from any nation can get on a team by invitation.

Also, the racers form combinations among themselves according to colors: yellow, green, white, tri-



Competitors in the Tour face numerous hazards along their way, not the least of which are level crossings. One cyclist decides to take an advantage over his opponents.

colored, etc. Anquetil, as leader of the yellow jerseys, had to select a man who would race the color victoriously. Only one man wore the color at a time — and that man, if he won, was forced to take last position the next day.

Then — according to the involved rules of the Tour — there is the Grand Prix of the Mountains. Racers strive for points that can only be made during the mountain laps, which occur on the 12th, 18th and 19th days over extremely rugged peaks.

It is here that the nearest hospitals are alerted. It is here that men die.

After a rest that seemed all too brief to the contestants, wearied feet again went into toe clips... At the signal "Go!" legs slammed down. Thin bicycle wheels whined. Speed picked up, hands reached under seats and threw the bikes into higher gear.

Someone spurred ahead. The pace immediately increased. Don't let him steal too big a lead. Hang on to him.

Look out. Here come the boys from the rear, fighting their way through the pack.

"Get out of my way! I'm coming through!"

"The hell with you."

Elbows flew. Bikes clashed against each other. All the riders were experts, champions, but under such conditions balance was hard to maintain on the high, narrow treaded wheels. Men staggered and fought to stay upright. Handle bars twisted and tyres gave little grunts of agony. So did the riders as they felt sharp elbows driven home deep into their ribs.

Behind them roared the caravan of attendant vehicles. The motor scooters whining to keep up, and the cars forging to the front. At the rear, in ominous procession, came the ambulances.

Van Looy was ramming his way to the lead, but not without competition. In this group no one could run away with the race, and such greats as Altig and Anquetil, Simpson of Great Britain, Massignan and Baldini of Italy, and Federico Bahamontes of Spain, weren't letting him steal a foot. The whole closely-packed mass was skimming the ground now, leaning forward, stretching out...

Wait — fall! One man down and two others crashing into his clamped down on hand brakes. Body, spilling over him. Fingers. Front and rear tyres squealed in protest. Two little clamps pressing against the sides of each tyre, trying to hold back the hurtling weight of a man's body. It couldn't be done efficiently. There was too much speed, too much forward momentum.

Men twisted their wheels, trying to avoid the snarl, and only succeeded in cutting in front of one another. They slammed into a grotesque mangle and more piled in from behind. A billiard-ball action started, a succession of crashes. The racers rushing to-



Twice a winner of the Tour de France, Fausto Coppi can be hailed as one of cycling's greats, along with Anquetil, Bobet, Thys and Baldini.

ward the knot of arms and legs were kicking out their toe clips and bailing off the speeding bikes, which speared riderless into the squirming mass.

The road was blocked solid with flesh and aluminium tubing. Those riders coming up from the rear steered off the road, swung around and kept going. Men were crawling out of the jam, hauling their bikes after them, then hopping on and chasing the rest. In many cases they left blood trails behind them. A few moved feebly in the road. Van Looy was on his hands and knees, shaking off the effects of the crash. Blood poured out of the exposed meat of his body. Some of the contestants sprawled unconscious. The automobiles rushed up to them, managers and doctors hopped out, administered first aid. Without fail, all of the seriously injured were so stimulated with competition-bred adrenalin that they pleaded to be allowed back on their bikes. They had to be restrained by force, shoved into cars and whisked away.

Rik Van Looy was out. The world champion had been a heavy favorite to win his first Tour, but it was all over for him now.

That was the start of the mountain lap over the road spiralling across the rugged Tournadef. Those "survivors" who were conserving their energy fell behind,

leaning low over their handlebars, just pumping steadily and swaying from side to side in that peculiar fashion a bicyclist uses to rest.

But another battle was on — for the coveted title of King of the Mountains. Federico Bahamontes, the Eagle of Toledo, shot out of the pack, slammed into the slope of the road and attacked it.

Massignan, an Italian champion as rugged as the mountain itself, whirled right after him in hot pursuit.

And then came Pauwels. The tough Belgian depended on raw energy and wouldn't let anybody get away with anything. If there was competition, he was in the thick of it.

Planckaert, another tough Belgian, yearned to prove he was good, if not better, than anybody else. The Frenchman, Poulidor, disputed the contention.

Jacques Anquetil was running his usual "mental" race. He needed time and he needed points — otherwise he wouldn't be pushing so hard over this mountain girdling horror in a sudden change of strategy. And he hung right in there, his fragile body making it look as if he was going to fall off the bike at any moment, but miraculously he always stayed with the leaders.

No one was going to run away with it. Even those who were

ing it easy trailed close behind. Those out in front tried to stretch the lead, but the pace increased right along with them.

It was all uphill work now, the bikes in their most powerful gear. The crowds, lining both edges of the road, cheered on their favorites. They bent their knees in pleas, made great pushing motions forward, even gave it a little "body-English" for encouragement.

So close to the border of Spain, there was a heavy Spanish element in the crowd.

"Come on, Freddie" they yelled at Bahamontes. "Pedall!"

Bahamontes was giving it his all, sitting up straight, getting leverage in his legs as he stroked . . . stroked . . . stroked. Yard by yard, turning those damn pedals by sheer muscle power, he climbed Tournadet.

Beside him labored Massignan. Close behind was the pack. Push. Stroke. Strain.

An exhalation of relief went up as the crawling column reached the crest. The leaders dipped over it — and sprinted ahead. Every one stepped up the pace as the race was on again, downhill. They careened madly, pedalling to pick up more and more speed. At 60 miles an hour they slammed around the dangerous mountain curves . . . just flashes of color as they whipped past crowded parking spots built because of the scenic views.

No time to look at scenery now. The riders had all they could do to

watch the road. It seemed to lunge up at them, come shooting into their faces. The vibration of the pounding wheels rolling over the rough spots made everything blur. They could ride only by instinct and experience, didn't have time to reason.

They wore fingerless gloves to protect their hands . . . fingerless because they needed delicacy of touch. Their thumbs and last two fingers were locked to the handlebars. The first two fingers of each hand operated the brakes.

The column whirled out of the mountains, arrowed for St Gaudens. The crowd let out a roar as they approached. There had been spectators every foot of the way, but in the more inaccessible spots they merely stood shoulder to shoulder. Here the road edges were solid with howling swarms.

Another daily winner — Cazala — and then the arguments started. The "formula" for the Tour had been changed this year. Previously, country had raced against country, and it made for a good deal of color. But the Tour de France, greatest bicycle race in the world, had outgrown national boundaries. Now the teams were assembled with selections from all nations, carefully formed with a view to each individual's strengths and weaknesses.

It made little difference to the riders. They were professionals.

The feelings of the spectators, however, were still drawn on a strictly national basis. The cafes in town pulsated to fierce arguments.

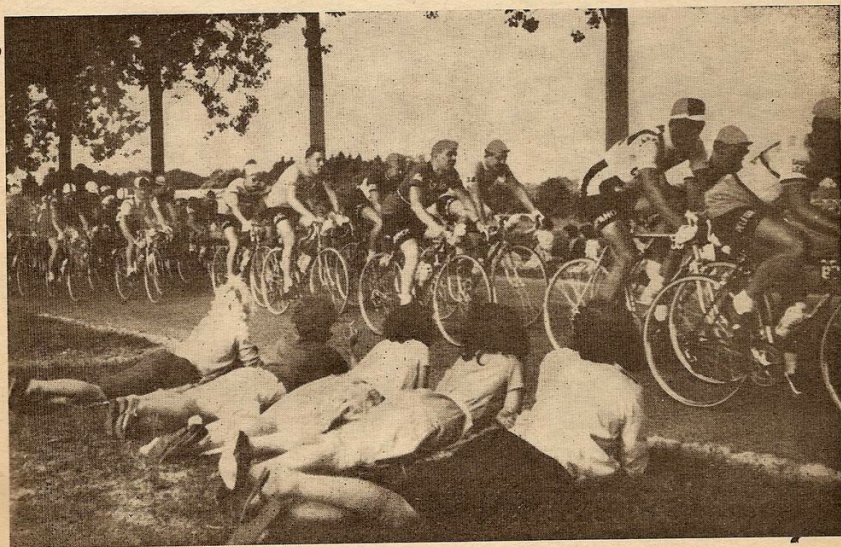
While police quelled the incipient riot, there was silence in the racers' trailer camp. They were binding their wounds, putting rubber hose over wrenched knees. None of them could sit comfortably while they did.

Many wives were along, and as they saw the magnificent physical specimens they had married turn into shambling wrecks, they wondered — is it worth it? Should a man whip his body for 22 days, become so exhausted he couldn't sleep, endure nerves that quivered so badly he was like an alcoholic in the last stages, force into his writhing stomach a diet of eggs and fruit juices? Is any money worth it?

Well, there was a lot of money involved — the grand prize netting approximately 100,000 dollars to the winner. Most of these champions had taken to bike racing in the firm belief it represented the path to wealth. But there was more to it than that. There was the fame, the honor, the glory. And above all, the elusive lure compelling them on and on — the thrill of competition, the pitting of one body against another, the triumphant feeling of knowing you are doing your best and winning . . . Ah, winning. These champions would have raced without the money, just to win.

Yes, to them, it was worth it.

It was this competitive spirit, this compulsive drive, that kept them struggling across the rugged Mediterranean coast of southern France. The semi-tropical heat, always hovering at 100 degrees,



In the villages and towns along the route, the streets are crowded with spectators. But on the outskirts of Namur, these girls get a good view of the competitors as they ride along.

broiled the juices out of their bodies.

Every one of them carried a vacuum bottle on a rack in front of the handle bars, and most carried a spare down near the chain sprocket. Racing along, straining and pushing for position, they'd bolt water down their gravelled throats, then pour the rest on their heads. Five minutes later, thirsty again, they were reaching for the spare canteen.

Between the oppressive July heat and the body-draining exertion, sweat spurted out of them. It cascaded down their faces, seared their eyes, momentarily blinded them as they drove their bikes at high speed. Their shirts were wet rags that clung and irritated. As the salt-saturated perspiration poured down their backs and buttocks, it burned into their open saddle sores. Just a few minutes after the start of the day's event, every one of them was in agony.

The route took them through the ancient towns of South France—Carcassonne, Montpellier, Aix-en-Provence. Their wheels caught between the cobblestones of the old streets. Their exhausted bodies were thrown heavily to the stones and shoulders, arms and legs were broken. Those who were cut severely got up again, kept pedalling while they bled, scalding sweat

dripping acid into the wounds on their legs.

And to add to their misery, the bouncing and jolting of the bikes on these rough sections were whip lashes on their saddle sores.

These men, honed to physical perfection for the start on June 24, 1962, were gradually being drained of strength. The pain of ultimate exhaustion was deeply etched on every face. Many times they raced with glazed eyes, staying in there with the blind instinct of long experience.

Time! Time! Day after grinding day. Each second a millstone that crushed them a little finer. Fourteen days, 15 days, 16 days, 17 days. Every day a new race, every day a new winner.

At the end of 17 days, they came whirling into Antibes. The Cote d'Azur resort town was jammed. Yachts packed the harbor and enough money was wagered to turn a Monte Carlo casino owner green. There were the usual arguments, the inevitable police actions, and as always, there was silence in the trailer camp.

Rudi Altig had won easily this day, steering his bike across the finish line with his knees, holding his arms wide and grinning in a "Look, ma, no hands" gesture. But there wouldn't be any easy winners after this day. Now be-

gan the toughest section of the course.

The Alpine laps came first, straight over the rugged mountains on the French-Italian border. Then a series of long reaches across the interior flatlands to Paris where distance was the primary obstacle. The racers would come out of the mountains crushed with exhaustion and facing the longest sections of the course. It was enough to discourage the strongest.

Jacques Anquetil was now a stumbling shadow. His eyes were washed vacant with fatigue, his nerves jumped and twisted uncontrollably. Yet with that strange moral strength of his, he determined to hang right in there, keep up with the leaders, not lose position nor time.

The 18th day—Antibes to Briancon, over the Restefond—almost 10,000 feet high—and the rugged Izoard. Mountains of scenic beauty, extremely popular resort areas, but not very popular among the racers on the Tour de France circuit.

Again Freddie Bahamontes squirted out of the pack coming to the Restefond. The good-looking Belgian boy, Emile Daems, came charging after him. Then, in a planned attack, Massignan, Gaul, Baldini and Pauwels came



The Tour is over for another year. Although won by Anquetil, Italian favorite Ercole Baldini crossed the finishing line with him. Baldini's face shows the strain of his effort.

whirling after both of them. The battle for King of the Mountains was waged by the strength in a man's legs and the courage in his heart.

Then the dip over the crest. The sudden surging power strokes as the pack slashed on. The whole column rushed down the mountain like falling rocks. They were driving for speed, flirting with disaster. Scenery rushed by them in a brown-and-green blur. The road came up at them with roller-coaster suddenness. The turns cracked like a whip.

A fall! A bad one. Pauwels was down, still skidding and leaving pieces of his flesh behind him. He rolled over and got up. There was a long deep tear in his right thigh. The side of his face looked as if he had been clawed by a tiger. The hell with it! He ran back for his bike, righted it, hopped on and chased the pack.

Two days over four huge mountains and numerous smaller ones between. The eyes of Europe were watching. Correspondents followed the progress of the race, were in on each start and finish. The radio issued hourly reports. Films were rushed to television stations.

Spanish newspapers hauled out their biggest type at the end of the 19th day.

"Freddie Bahamontes, Eagle of Toledo, Again King of the Mountains," bellowed the red banners dominating the front pages.

Massignan placed second, it was regretfully noted by the Italian newspapers, but the really interesting fact was that the tough Belgian, Pauwels — not really as skilful as some of his countrymen — had battled his way across the finish line in sixth position, grinning and bleeding at the same time.

Somehow, in his own particular mysterious fashion, Jacques Anquetil had hung right in there and finished ninth in the Mountain Grand Prix. Truly remarkable, because he had been conserving his strength. Still he was close to collapse, a normal condition with him during a race, and wanted to know but one thing — how was his time?

"Excellent!" his manager assured him as he held Jacques up and guided him to the trailer. "Get plenty of rest. Tomorrow is a 'time lap'."

It was a short leg coming up that had to be done at top speed — from Bourg to Lyon, just 68 kilometres (under 45 miles). These sprints were Jacquot's meat, although it is hard to understand how he exacts sustained bursts of speed out of his fragile body. Exhausted, trembling, he was sure that this would be his day and he took the yellow jersey.

Like most of the really great racers participating, he labored under a one-minute handicap which would be added to his finishing time. At the signal—Go!—he was fighting his way through the pack.

All of them were fighting this

day. Forty-two and a half miles — an easy distance for these long-ranging pedallers. No one could steal a race here. The man who won would have to push the others aside. From the first moment that pack was in high speed and ripping down the road in a solid jam.

Here came Anquetil. He saw a hole forming momentarily, slipped into it, held his new position. Racing toe to toe, elbow to elbow, his knees were white pistons churning up higher than his hands. Bent low, blond hair whipping, he looked for those little openings.

Inch by inch Anquetil fought his way to the front, mouth open and gasping, face pulled down in pain. He wasn't leading the pack alone. Ercole Baldini, his blunt face and sharp nose thrust into the wind, battled alongside at Jacquot's right. Ray Poulidor, ex-champion of France, was grim-lipped with effort on the other side. Joe Planckaert, marvellous Belgian rider well in contention at every day's finish, was right up there fighting his damndest now.

The four of them, bent low,

straining and scrambling for every foot, battled head to head, neck muscles standing out like taut steel with the strain of it all.

Then Jacquot forged out of the line, putting on one of his bursts that he manufactured solely from willpower. He edged ahead. He was alone. Soon he was trailing a line of riders behind him. Try as they would — and did — they couldn't catch Anquetil during one of his tremendous dashes.

He flashed into the old city of Lyon three minutes ahead of the furiously pedalling Ercole Baldini, and five minutes ahead of Ray Poulidor and Joe Planckaert. The mainly French crowd stood and roared their approval.

"Jacquot! Jacquot! The Magnificent One."

He had kept up that scintillating burst of speed for a solid 20 miles.

Last day — July 15, 1962 — and one of the hardest — 271 kilometres, 170 miles. And they had to do this after they had been punishing themselves for 21 days.

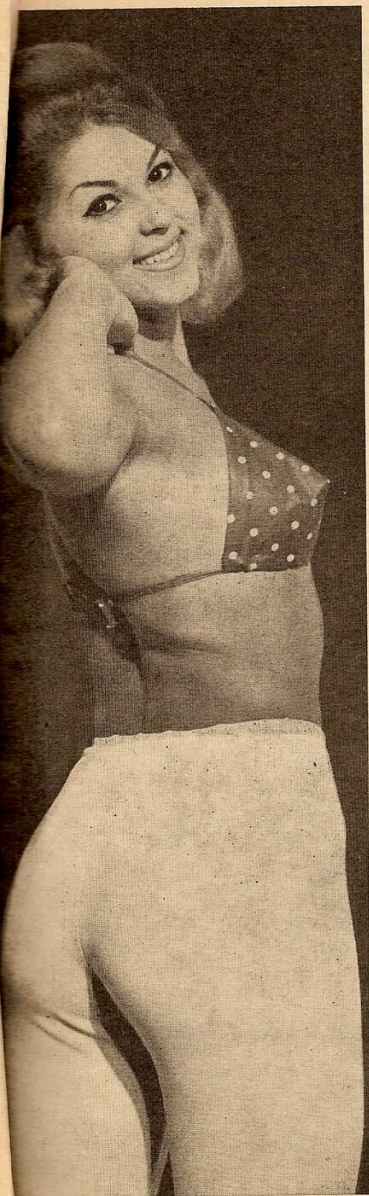
(Continued on page 41)



Competitors carry a vacuum flask on a rack in front of the handle bars, and most carry a spare down near the chain sprocket. They bolt water down their gravelled throats, then pour the rest over their heads.

LIFE IS NEVER DULL





A housewife's work is never done
No matter how she hurries,
So this bright gal
Let us in
On her secret of success.
She takes it slow and easy
With never a fuss or bother
And makes a game of menial chores
To brighten the dulllest moments.



DOUBLE-CROSS THE DEALER

Three years was a long time. Nick had told himself, in stir, that it was over. The past was behind him. He'd paid up, he was clean, he was staying clean. But Carla had met him at the gate . . .

IT took Nick just three minutes after he had stepped out past the big gates to realise that he was being tailed. The casual glances that he drifted back along the crowded street hadn't picked out the man — but he knew there was a tail.

Not even three years behind the wall had dulled the senses that told him he was being followed. Thirty-two years in the Concrete jungle weren't wiped out by three years in stir.

He took a deep breath, and paused to glare into the shop window at the tall, heavy-browed man in the ill-fitting grey suit who glared back at him. His left hand lightly held the small grip that contained his few effects, but his right hand, deep in his trouser pocket, was clenched into a hard knuckled fist.

A tail. The police? Unlikely. He'd done his stretch. Model prisoner. Two years' remission. Currier, then? Currier. It had to be. But why?

Nick moved on easily. When the tramcar swung abreast of him and slowed at the lights he jumped aboard, ignoring the protest of the conductor. Nick didn't even turn his head when the guy in the tan shirt beat the lights too. He just sat stiffly, staring out of the window as the old, familiar street slid past — the streets of his childhood, the streets of his vicious childhood.

Three years in stir, it should have wiped all that off the slate. It was supposed to — he had been determined that it had to be that way. But now, three minutes out and already the fugitive sweat was on him again, the excitement crawling cold in his belly. He was being tailed. Currier's man.

Currier didn't know it yet, but he had made a big mistake.

The streets were sleazy and quiet when Nick dropped off the tramcar. As he walked along in his ill-fitting suit incurious children looked up out of the dirt at him, briefly. There was nothing about him that they found interesting. They couldn't see the cold anger that grew inside him.

Three paces past the corner the street was deserted and the narrow alleyway yawned to his left,

just where he had remembered it. He stepped in swiftly and waited with ragged breath for the light slap of leather on asphalt. It quickened as it came past the corner and then there was the tan shirt under Nick's arm. The wiry, wriggling body came whirling into the alley, to be pinned against the slimy alley wall.

Nick thrust his forearm viciously into the struggling man's throat while with his left hand he held the man's gun hand firmly in the pocket to which it had dived.

"Currier?" snarled Nick. "Currier sent you?"

Tan-Shirt's fetid breath whistled excitedly on his cheek and the anger mounted in Nick's chest. He felt the pound of the man's throat through the cloth of his jacket as he stared into Tan-Shirt's wide, scared eyes. Then a heel ground into his instep, and he was forced to twist away, but his arm was still forcing the man against the wall. With the pain in his instep Nick's anger grew and Tan-Shirt's eyes bulged.

The redness was in Nick now, the redness he had sworn to put aside after the last three years. It was back with him and he couldn't fight it. He gritted his teeth, driving in with his forearm.

Then suddenly it was changed. Something was happening. He heard the squeal in the street, car tyres. His forearm slackened off involuntarily as he jerked his head aside to see the long grey sedan slide past the alleyway. Then Tan-Shirt was slipping away, down from him. He grabbed viciously for the man's throat but an elbow caught him hard in the groin, twisting him. Tan-Shirt was oiling away, diving back into the street like a panicked jack-rabbit.

Nick didn't follow. He stood there in the alleyway, his back to the wall, his chest heaving. He stared at the girl stepping from the grey sedan. He saw the lissom figure, the long dark hair, the free walk, and three years rolled back from him like they had never been.

Carefully, Nick slipped the

small key into the safe deposit box. A click, the door opened and Nick slid his hand inside. His stomach was quiet, his blood cool. It was as though he had known all along that the money wouldn't be there. As if he had known all through the long nights of those three years, known that for him there would be nothing but the double-cross.

Calmly he closed the safe, walked out of the building, out into the sunshine to the grey sedan. Carla slid away from him so he could take the wheel. He said nothing — there was no need. She had seen his empty eyes.

He drove out through the town with care — only when they reached the city limit did he open up the engine. Not till then did Carla speak.

"You sure that was the place?" she asked quietly. Her beautiful face was still.

"I'm sure."

His reply was laconic. Sure! What the hell else could he be after three years thinking about it? Wondering if Currier would carry out his side. Wondering. His thoughts drifted back . . .

Lou Seeger on the carpet with the wound high in his chest, and his mouth open foolishly. The cool look on Currier's heavy face, a calm that was belied only by the hint of fear in his eyes. It was then that he had propositioned Nick.

"It's five grand, Nick. Just to get rid of him. Safely."

Currier had had it all set. The light plane, the drop from 40,000 and Lou Seeger just wouldn't be around any more. The only occasion that Currier had done his own dirty work would be only a memory.

But it hadn't worked quite like that. An inquisitive mechanic had smelt a rat and seen blood — Lou Seeger's blood. And Nick — had been all set for the Chair. Except that he had got his second proposition.

" . . . leave it me, Nick, and you beat the rap. I got Harlan lined up, smart mouthpiece, boy. All you got to do is to admit that you were all set to lever Lou out of the plane. But you didn't kill him. That's all. It'll be a five-





Bob Schuchman

"Starting tomorrow you'll be Mr Merton's secretary . . . he's threatening to quit."

year stretch, Nick. Just five. If my name don't come out."

As simple as that. Currer would alibi Nick for the hour that Seeger had died, but Nick had to plead guilty to getting rid of the body. And Harlan would get him off with five.

Nick had looked at Currer.

"It'll cost you, Currer."

The hand that had slapped his shoulder had been bluff, the voice genial.

"Don't I know it, Nick, don't I know it!"

And he had handed Nick the key. The key that now lay in Nick's pocket. The useless key that had opened a box full of air. The engine of the grey sedan changed its note as he gunned it into the freeway. Carla's hand touched his arm, lightly.

"Take it easy, Nick."

"Easy," he snarled, his pent up anger suddenly seeking release. "Currer crossed me! I took that rap for him and gave him three years of my life. All he had to do was put some stinkin' money in a box. But he crossed me!"

"Nick—"

"And you!" he snapped viciously. "What about you? Three years of silence, after all the promises! Three years' silence and then there you are again, outside the alleyway! Maybe three years is too long, Carla, when it's been no word. You realised that?"

She was silent for a long while. There was only the vibrant roar of the air on the windscreen and the curving, whipping road under the tyres. Then quietly she said, "I'm going to level with you, Nick. I admit, two months after you went up I decided I couldn't take it, couldn't wait for you. I had to forget, get you out of my system. I kidded myself for two years, Nick. Then I knew it was only you."

He laughed shortly.

now. I said it took me two years to know you were the only one for me. You haven't asked me what I did after that."

"I'm asking," gritted Nick.

"I went interstate. Why, you say? Because that's where Currer's organisation is centred these days. He's moved, moved high, Nick. I moved too. I sang in his night club, met his boys, even joined his party once or twice. . . ."

The road sprang whitey under the headlights of the sedan. Nick slowed, swinging the car away from the freeway toward the hard shoulder and the small clump of trees. The engine idled then died. Nick turned to face the girl beside him. In the twilight her face was a pale, beautiful oval.

"I know his place, Nick, know the setup. I know the way in, and I know the way out. . . ."

Three years . . . Nick had said to himself, in stir, that it was over. The past was behind him. He'd paid up, he was clean, he was staying clean. Carla was gone, Currer and his way of life was gone. It was going to be the money and a new life. And now it was nothing, only the three years.

"We can do it, Nick, the two of us and we can make up the lost years. There's only Currer."

And the redness, and the violence, and the life Nick had thrown aside. But now it was life in his blood. . . .

"Currer," he said thickly, "Currer can wait. For a little while. . . ."

In the darkness his hands reached out for the warmth that awaited him.

Nick paid off the cab and walked the five blocks to the tall apart-



"Why, I don't think 27 is very old."

ment building. Third corner, one block and then the network of fire escape ran crazily upwards into the darkness. He jumped, hung on the iron and then hand over hand, he drew himself up. His steps tapped lightly on the rungs as he climbed.

The penthouse. It gleamed like a beacon above his head. Nick paused to look down at the city below him. The gun lay heavy under his shoulder. Insurance. There was to be no blood. Without blood, there would be no squeal from Currer. Nick was only going to take what belonged to him. What Currer had promised him.

And out there, across the darkness and the night, a two hour car ride away lay the Pacific surf and the beach house and the launch.

"It's the safest course," Carla had insisted. "Currer will be mad. He might get the police on to you, on some trumped up charge. He has connections at City Hall and could be those cops will be a bit too rough to ever allow you to get to court to drag up the stuff that would incriminate Currer. Get out of the country, it's safer. The police can't touch you, even if they suspect you at all."

He wondered what he would have done without Carla. If she hadn't been there to meet him when he came out from the gates. She had seen him from the car and had been puzzled when he boarded the tramcar. She had followed in the sedan and had seen him leave and turn down the streets . . .

If she hadn't been there . . . What would he have done when he found the empty deposit box? Would he have shrugged, chalked it up to experience, fought down the bitter red hate that even now surged in him? The man in the alley—Tan-Shirt—would he have got away with his life? Had it been Tan-Shirt's intention to allow Nick to reach the deposit box and know he'd been crossed? Or was Nick to have died first—under Currer's order?

Nick grimaced and continued to climb. Soon, he'd know. Soon, when he reached the penthouse.

A low wall, the roof garden. Currer had moved high in the world, high to the penthouse, high in society. The window, the slightly parted curtain and the door. The key. Carla's key.

"I told you, Nick . . . I—I met his boys in the club, joined his party. One night, he was drunk, he touched me, gave me the key, leered, said come see him some time . . . I never went, Nick, I never went . . ."

The key in Nick's hand was still able to churn his blood, move the red heat in his veins.

And then, through the parted curtain, was Currer, bigger, fatter than Nick remembered, wearing a red smoking jacket and glaring moodily at a small table laid out with expensive food and champagne. As he watched, Currer turned angrily and strode across to the pink and green telephone



"Have you seen my husband?"

at the far end of the room. Nick inserted the key and the oiled lock turned smoothly. The curtain billowed and then he was in the room.

His voice was hard.

"Don't bother, Currer."

They had worked it out in the car, Nick and Carla. Carla's call to Currer. Yes, he had remembered her. When Carla had come back from the call her face had been pale but triumphant. Currer would be delighted to see her, at his penthouse. Tonight.

Except that she wouldn't be arriving. Nick would.

"Put the phone down. Quietly."

The menace in Nick's tone made Currer do just that. The heavy shoulders dropped as he replaced the phone on its cradle. But his nerve hadn't gone.

Slowly he turned around to see the man who had entered the penthouse. Nick guessed that two years in prison must have changed him. Currer didn't seem to recognise him at once. For some reason this disturbed Nick and he stepped forward, coming closer with the gun heavy in his hand.

Currer's heavy face took on a bewildered look.

"Nick! But you—you were in prison!"

Nick grinned. He hadn't remembered that Currer had been so much the funny man, so much the one who moulded his features to suit his needs. Now he looked as though Nick was the last person he expected to see in the world. Which, maybe, was true at that.

"Don't you remember?" grinned Nick. "I came out four days ago."

Currer had regained his composure somewhat. His hands had dropped a little lower. Nick watched him through veiled lids.

"Four days! But you were sent up for a five year stretch! Played it smart, eh, Nick?" Remission. But why the rod, eh?"

With the question his bluster seemed to come back too.

"And how the hell did you get in here anyway? Look, Nick, I'm expecting company and—"

"She won't be coming," said Nick. "And I got no time to waste. Let's go see the safe, currer."

The big man in the smoking jacket scowled.

(Continued on page 46)



THE RUSTLED REDHEAD

FACT • STUART JAMES

Editor's Note: Wyatt Earp was born in Illinois and went West on a wagon train when he was 16. He was a top gunslinger, perhaps the most courageous one of all, who kept delinquent cowboys in line as marshal of Dodge City, Kansas, and later Tombstone, Arizona. He had a fast draw and a slow temper and the reputation of hitting whatever he shot at. Though Earp operated mainly in the post-Civil War days of the West, he lived until 1929.

Wyatt Earp, the legendary Western lawman and his top gun, Doc Holiday, took on a love-sick Texan and the meanest gal in Dodge City.

LIKE a pair of searching fingers, the steel rails angled out from Chicago — hugging the new earth, pointing westward. And where they stopped was like the raw, violent infection at the end of a blood vessel. Dodge City.

The railroad! A disorganized scramble of green-timber shacks, the dusty main street channelled by the gaudy false-fronts, the street that was a daily polyglot of wagons and drop-backed mules, and horsemen, sweating, bristle-chinned trail riders, loose women and tight merchants, the gamblers, the hard-eyed longriders. This was the end of the long drives from Texas. Kansas, 1876.

This was the capital of a cruel land, a city bulging with violence. And the lord of this hell was a man named Wyatt Earp, a moustached, tacturn lawman who ruled the roost with a sawnoff shotgun, a trio of quick-triggered brothers, and a hawk-eyed, emaciated top gun named Doc Holiday. Ramrodding Dodge City meant being tougher and faster than the meanest brushpoppers ever sired in Commanche County, made meaner by a thousand miles in the leather, eating dust behind a herd of evil-tempered longhorns — and Wyatt Earp was legend in his trade. He had killed his share, brought in the notorious Ben Thompson, and enforced the "no guns" rule in Dodge. He had never been outsmarted.

And then a gangling, tow-headed Texan with the improbable name of Hallie Winthrop came along and spoiled the perfect record.

It was September, 1876, when Hallie Winthrop came whooping into Dodge City with the rest of

the crew from Charlie Weimer's Bar T spread, up from Fort Worth. They were all unarmed with the exception of Hallie, who had an ancient Walker Colt jammed into the waist of his dusty jeans. The group converged on the Crystal Palace, bellied up to the long bar.

"Set 'em up here," Hallie shouted, slamming his palm on the bar. "We're rattlesnake mean ole critters from down Texas way and we got dust in the craw." He let out a rebel whoop. The bartender set up the drinks and eyed the boy. He had seen them come and go and he knew the signs. Hallie was Texas noisy and his smile was as wide as his native State, but the bartender eyed the gun butt and sent for the marshal.

When Wyatt and his brother Virgil pushed through the batwings of the Crystal Palace, the party was getting underway with Hallie dancing a reel with a frightened swamper and hooting at the rafters. Wyatt watched the boy with amusement and waited until the dance ended before he approached. Virgil stayed by the door and Wyatt stepped up to Hallie.

"My name's Earp," he said. "I'm marshal here. I'll check your gun until you ride out."

Hallie stepped back. The smile didn't leave his face. He reached out and grasped Wyatt's outstretched hand and shook it like a pump handle. "Plumb pleased to meet ya, Marshal. I've shore heard about you."

Wyatt recovered his hand. "The gun," he said quietly. "I'll take it."

Hallie whipped the pistol from

his belt, flipped it over in his hand and extended it butt-first. "Ain't even loaded, Mister Earp. I just wore it in here because they told me you'd be right around to get it soon as I hit town, and I wanted to make sure I met you. My ole Pap is an admirer of yours and I wanted to tell him when I got back."

Wyatt took the gun and smiled, liking the youth and flattered at the same time. "What's your name, boy?"

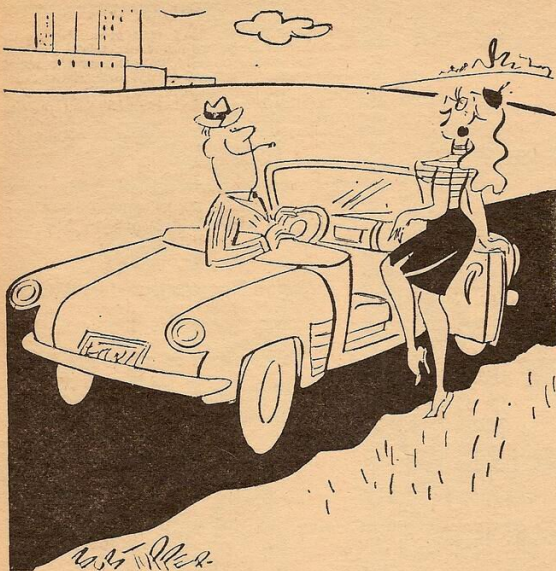
"Hallie Winthrop. I'm outta Fort Worth. This is my first drive and I'm low-share rider with the Bar T."

Wyatt smiled again, then turned to the bar. "Set up a round for the Bar T, Harry. Good luck to you, Hallie." He turned and left the saloon, thinking that he had seen the last of the boy. But he hadn't figured on a good supply of red eye, Big Jack Taggart, and the charms of Annie Marsh.

Big Jack Taggart hit town a few hours after the crew from the Bar T. A huge, bearded man, he was a season trail driver, foreman for the Holcomb's Lazy S. He had the size and temper of a cinnamon grizzly. His crew took up the rest of the bar space in the Crystal Palace, and Big Jack's voice was the first to bellow, "Where's the girls?"

It was like pulling a string, because the girls were upstairs waiting for booze to get flowing, and they hit the stairs at the first shout. It was still mid-afternoon, but anytime was party-time in Dodge just so long as the boys were ready to whoop it up and part with their cash.

The piano was banging away,



"I could take the bus but I find hitch-hiking such a wonderful way to meet people!"

and the rest of the girls were already making their plays, when Annie Marsh appeared on the landing above the barroom and started down the stairs. She was a tall girl, and a vast expanse of white flesh showed above the low-cut green gown that hugged the full curves of her lush body, the swell of her full breasts spilling over the clinging fabric. She moved with a swinging grace. Her chin was lifted and her bright red hair was piled high on her head. Once, Annie had shot an over-anxious cowpoke square between the eyes when he man-handled her. She just grabbed up a handy gun and let him have it!

Hallie saw her and went slack-jawed. He started forward and collided with Taggart who had the same idea. The two men stopped and eyed one another, then Taggart shove ahead. He went to Annie, took her arm in his grasp and guided her to a table. He sat her down and dragged his own chair in close. Hallie draped his raw-boned frame over a chair on the opposite side of the table, cupped his chin in his hands and just stared at Annie.

Taggart turned away from Annie and snarled at Hallie. "Whatta ya looking at?"

Hallie was speechless. He had never set eyes on anything like Annie. He just kept staring.

"You hear me talking to you, boy?" Taggart's voice was a flat, low drawl.

"I heard ya," Hallie said, not

taking his eyes from Annie. "You asked me what I'm looking at. I'm looking at the prettiest gal I ever seen in my whole darned life."

"Get up, boy," Taggart came to his feet. Hallie smiled and unlimbered.

"Let's dance!" Annie shouted. She reached out and grabbed Tag-

gart and spun him away from the table. The piano went into it and Annie whirled the big man around the middle of the floor. Hallie watched and clapped his hands happily. When the music ended and Taggart took Annie to another table, Hallie dogged their heels and took up his former position.

"Look here, boy," Taggart growled. "You better haul leather or I'm gonna notch you like a stray yearling."

"Shucks, Mister," Hallie said. "Where I come from they use the likes of you for crow meat."

Taggart came out of his chair with a swinging motion that brought him half around the table in a single movement. He was already swinging a sledge-hammer fist. He connected with Hallie's jaw — the sound a resounding crack — and the boy jackknifed out of his chair, rolled and stopped end-up and unmoving.

The Bar T riders carried Hallie to a back room and left him to recover. When he did, he came out bellowing like a calf. He made a bee-line for Taggart and a heavy oak chair stopped him in mid-stride. He didn't stagger and he didn't stumble. He stood for a moment, stiffened and then went down like a felled tree.

When the Bar T riders came for Hallie this time, they shouldered him and moved to the Lucky Dollar directly across the street. The brand had been insulted and it was just a matter of time before the fight blossomed.

The swamper from the Crystal Palace slammed, breathless, through the door of the marshal's office and blurted his message. "They just sent a message over to the Lazy S crew saying that they're coming in after Annie at eight o'clock. One of the crew rode out to get their guns, and the Lazy S bunch are already getting armed."

The crowd at the Crystal Palace



"I gave him the hottest years of my life!"

was roaring when Wyatt and his brothers arrived. Doc Holiday stationed himself outside to keep an eye on the Lucky Dollar and the others entered.

A silence settled over the saloon. Morgan and Jim Earp fanned out to the sides and Virgil back of Wyatt.

"You oughta keep out of this, Earp," Taggart growled. "You ain't got no invite to this fight."

"Just stand pat, Taggart," Wyatt answered, the shotgun waist high, covering the table where the bearded man sat with Annie Marsh. Wyatt turned slightly to see that his brothers were covering the rest of the crowd, then he turned back to Taggart. "Get on your feet and stand away from the table, Taggart."

Taggart moved toward the bar, scowling drunkenly, but helpless under the show of guns.

"Okay, Annie," Earp said. "Now you get on your feet. I'm taking you in."

"What!" Annie leaped to her feet, her hands gripping the edge of the table, her red hair tossing. "You can't do this!"

"Now just take it easy, Annie," Wyatt said, smiling. "You're getting locked up."

"For what?"

"Well," Wyatt said, letting his eyes run over the expansive chest that spilled over the gown. "Let's say it's for the public display of a lethal weapon." He nodded to Morgan and Virgil and they moved forward and took hold of the squirming, biting, kicking female. At the door Jim holstered his gun and took her feet. They carried her down the street and deposited her—still shouting—in a cell. Then one of the men went to the Lucky Dollar and passed the word that Annie was no longer available.

Hallie made a visit to the jail. He stood over Wyatt's desk. "I'd shore like to see that little ole girl, Marshal."

"Look, Hallie, why don't you just forget that girl."

"Cain't. I've decided to take her back to Texas."

"What would you do with her in Texas?"

"Settle her down in a house. I got a small spread of my own out near Hondo."

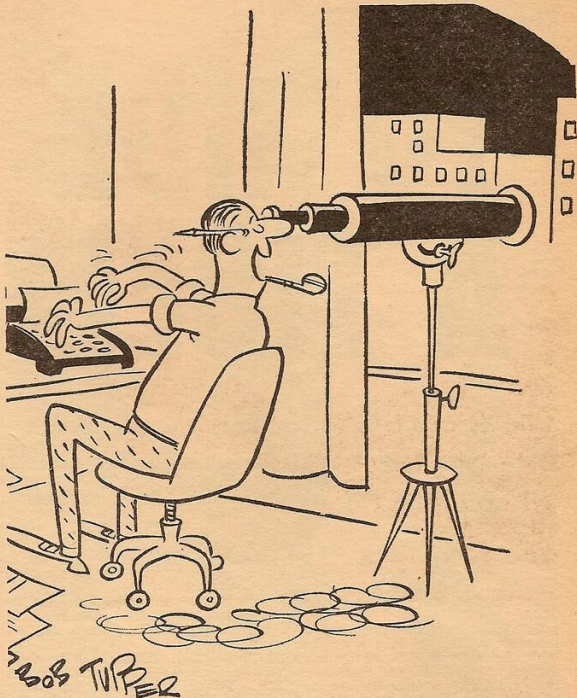
"Maybe Annie would have something to say about that," Wyatt thought and went to the heavy door that opened into the cells. He called through the grilled window. "Hey, Annie, this young cowpoke wants to take you back to Texas with him."

"Get that cow nurse out of my sight!"

"Well, I guess that settles it," Wyatt said, smiling. "And aside from that, boy, Annie stays where she is until you and Taggart clear out of town."

Hallie shifted from foot to foot and looked down with sheepish rejection. "Well, Mr Earp, I reckon if that ole girl don't want me I might just as well be cutting out."

The smile left Wyatt's face. He rose and came around the desk. "You're not kidding, are you, boy?"



"... then slowly he crushed her to him."

Damned now if I'm not sorry about this."

"Ooh, that's okay. Well, I'll be leaving," Hallie said.

"It's been nice meeting you, Hallie," Wyatt said. He shook the cowpoke's hand. "Wait a minute. I'll give you back your Colt."

"I'd plumb forgot about it," Hallie said.

Wyatt went to his desk drawer and brought out the gun. He handed it over butt first. Hallie handled the gun, smiled and said thanks. Wyatt stooped to close the drawer, and Hallie whirled into action. He brought the long barrel down over Wyatt's ear with a dull thud. He jerked the keys away before Wyatt hit the deck. He let himself into the cell area.

"C'mon, girl, I'm getting you out of here!"

"I'd rather stay here!" Annie screamed.

"Don't talk like that to your future husband, woman. Let's get going."

Annie's voice was suddenly lowered. The dancehall hardness was put aside for the moment. "Did you say husband?" she purred between the bars.

Hallie jerked open the cell door and hauled her out. "Hey, wait a minute!" she shouted.

"No time!" He grabbed her and flung her over his shoulder. As he broke into the office, Wyatt was coming to his feet. Reaching out, Wyatt spun the boy off his feet and sent Annie sprawling. Hallie came up swinging, but Wyatt was on him, pinning him down.

"Hold it there, Wyatt," Annie shouted from behind them, leveling the Marshal's shotgun. "This is the first man that ever tried to steal me for marriage, and if he wants to steal me, you just keep out of it."

Wyatt came to his feet, taking his eyes from Hallie. Still fighting mad, Hallie leaped up and swung the Colt again, dropping Wyatt a second time. He then jerked the shotgun from Annie's hands, threw her over his shoulder again and made a bee-line for his horse.

The Earp brothers arrived as they were disappearing from the edge of town. They roused Wyatt with Doc Holiday bellowing that he'd track the cowpoke down and gut-shoot him.

"Leave 'em go," Wyatt said, smiling and rubbing his head. "If he thinks the trip up here with a longhorn was mean, just wait'll he finishes the trip back."

TO RIDE A TIGER

The kid came to us soft and fancy. Rita cast her spell and we had a fighter on our hands. I had always wanted a champion like that. And now I had him—a monster.

THAT was a weird one.

I still don't know how to figure it. All I know is my spine turns to ice every time I think of it.

But I don't suppose you can remember what the kid was like when he first came down from up there, can you? All you and everyone else can remember is the snarling tiger that slashed men to ribbons, that killed a man, that went out to the flash of gunfire and the thunder of a bullet.

And if you knew him at close quarters you were glad he had been brought down. It was like being delivered from a marauding beast that was likely to turn on anyone.

But I can remember him before that. I can remember him when he first came down.

And that's what made it so weird. That and what Tracker told me.

In the daytime I can kid myself I don't believe it. But at night I believe it and my flesh crawls . . .

Tracker came in that night like he always did — scruffy, battered around the edges, and like he was walking up to put the bite on you.

I was getting ready to say no, but then I thought — what the heck — he looks like he really needs it this time.

I said, "Eow's Queensland? I bet you just loved Surfers. How could you tear yourself away?"

Tracker squinted at me, took his hat off and pushed at his mop of tousled grey hair. "I got a kid, George. He's good. Middleweight. Young. Build up into a light-heavy. Moves like a big Jack Hassen."

I said, "What colored kid doesn't? They're all Hassens, all

Richards. Until they get in a ring down here. And who wants a light-heavy?"

"This kid is good, George. I've seen 'em all back to Starlight and he could be better than any of 'em."

"Naturally. Being better than Dave Sands is really nothing at all. You're still singing the same old song, Tracker, word for word."

I said, curiously, just in case, "You got him with you?"

Tracker, eyes starting to gleam at the thought of a sponsor, nodded. He turned his head. "Hey, Joe."

The kid came in. He was about as good-looking a boy as you could wish to see. Plainly a half-caste, he had done a remarkable thing. He had retained all the regal qualities of his ancient race and had somehow picked up all the best from whatever erring white boy or girl had been his other parent.

Tracker said, nodding at me like I was the open road to a fortune, "This is Mr Trevaskis, son. He'll see you get a break."

I said, "Now, wait a minute, Tracker. I'm only a pub owner who likes the fights and who's managed a fighter or two. Not Mike Jacobs."

The kid grinned at me. If he had had a guitar he could have knocked the girls for a sky-high loop. "Pleased to meet you Mr Trevaskis. Mr Torrence has told me a lot about you."

I liked the mister business. A kid who knows his manners gets your respect. I looked at Tracker. "Where are you staying?"

Tracker looked sideways at me. "Well—"

I said, "All right, there's a room



up top for both of you. Until we see what he's got." I stared at Tracker. I said sarcastically, "Has Rita looked into her crystal ball about him? What does she see? Fame and riches beyond your wildest dreams?"

Tracker shot me a funny look. "Yes, George, she does."

I said, "Well, that clinches it. I'll be able to sell the pub and retire."

There was a scrape of legs in tight gold lame pants rubbing against one another and Silvana came down the stairs. I had told her about going around dressed like that before she did her act, but she was proud of her body and what it did to men. She spotted the kid and gave him the eye, a tigress sizing up her prey. The



kid smiled back at her, innocent as a novice monk.

I said, "On your way, beautiful. The drooling customers are waiting."

She went past, still looking back, giving that smile that made your blood act like Niagara.

I looked back at them. "Grab yourselves a steak each and then get to bed. You look like you need both."

I watched them go. The kid looked good, all lean greyhound grace. But there was something missing. I knew suddenly it was the lethal twist to the mouth every top gladiator needed. Maybe he twisted his mouth that way in the ring. We'd see . . .

Stripped he looked like the

young Sugar Ray. Only bigger.

But the venom wasn't there. I had got hold of young rock-fisted Kelly and put him in with him to try him out. But it was like trying to rouse a snake that had just had a big feed. He wasn't interested in doing anything but dancing around and giving Kelly half-a-dozen taps for every wallop Kelly gave him.

After three delicate rounds I called time. While he was getting dressed I went over to Tracker. "What is this? He couldn't knock a mozzie off his chin. You know that hitters are the only ones that pay off in this racket."

Tracker said, "Now, listen, George, he can be shown. You've got to admit he's got class."

"Who wants to see a big boy

who dances around like Robert Helpmann? The bigger they are the harder they've got to hit."

Rita came in the door and walked over to us. She was blonde, battered, no longer young but still appealing. There was always that glint in her eyes that made you feel like your mind had a glass window and she was looking straight through it.

She said, right off, "So you think the kid's no good, George?"

I shook my head. "He's good, all right. But he's good like an Olympic amateur. Fancy and harmless. In the pro game there's only room for tigers."

She stared at me, those weird eyes of hers making me feel mentally naked. She said suddenly, "He'll get to be a tiger. Tracker



"Tell me, Rodwell, how did you wangle these seats?"

looked around, still smiling. "Get him to meet a couple of decent girls of his own blood. There's a dozen lovely kids out at the hostel now." He looked at me. "Thanks for that donation. It was a big help."

I grinned at him. "That's all right, Rev. I won a few quid on you a time or two, remember, before you took up this racket you're in now."

He turned to go. "Remember, George — tell him to come out and see me."

"I'll do that." I was as interested as he was in keeping the kid away from the strippers — especially Silvana.

I went into the dining-room and walked straight into Silvana and the man she was eating with. He was lean and suave with a face as cruel as an Ottoman sultan, and with a livid furrow across his right temple. Everyone knew the furrow had been caused by a bullet fired by a rival in the days of the big baccarat. They had found the rival floating in the sea. The police knew who had put him there but couldn't prove it.

I said slowly, "Why don't you take your doll somewhere else and feed her, Ace?"

He shot a razor-blade look at me. "I like it here, publican. But I've got a complaint about the beer. It's a bit flat." He looked at Silvana and said with the hissing sound that passed for a laugh, "The women around here aren't flat, though."

He stopped grinning. He looked better that way. "I understand you've got a new boy, George. I'd like a piece of a good fighter."

"I don't cut up fighters piece-meal," I told him. "If he's any good he's all mine. But to save you the trouble I don't think he'll be any good."

The kid came in, fresh from the gym, ready to put the feedbag on and looking like a young god who had just winged his way down from Olympus. Silvana slid her hot black eyes over him as he went past.

Ace flashed a look at her that flickered fear into her eyes. He hissed, "You make a pass at him and I'll break your back—slow."

He looked at me. "We'll see about the kid, George. Let's just leave it at this — if he's any good you'll be cutting me in." He glanced at his glass. "And now tell that dumb waiter to bring us some fresh beer."

I turned and went out. Tracker was just coming in. He looked over at Ace and narrowed his eyes. "Does he come here often?"

"Too often. It's that stripper he's sitting with."

"Why don't you fire her?"

"Are you crazy? She brings more men in here than free beer. They all think they have a chance with her, and some of the better-heeled ones did — until Ace took over. But they still come just to look at her."

can make him into one.' "

I said, "You know how wrong that is. Either they're born assassins or they're not. This one's not. He's fancy and fast for his size but that's not what I'm looking for."

Rita looked at Tracker and he came at me again. She had a hold over him like Rasputin had over the Czarina. I didn't wonder at it with those eerie eyes of hers. Tracker said, "Look, George, I can teach him to hit. I can—"

I said, "Maybe you can, but you can't put the tiger in him — the venom, the bite. And without that you might as well let him audition for the ballet instead. We'll get him a couple of fights and if he still doesn't show any sting I'm not buying. I want a slugger I can make dough out of. The other kind have cost me too much."

When I walked away I could feel Rita's X-ray eyes staring after me, thinking about it. Maybe she'd find a way. She could find more dough and spend more of it than any other dame I'd ever seen. And after her last clash with the

cops over her fortune-telling racket she'd been down for a long time. She'd try hard and so would Tracker. But this one looked a bit too tough for them both.

When I got back the Rev was there, little and cheery and with the teeth shining in his black face like a neon sign against the night sky. He never got out to my place much these days. I think the strippers were a bit too much for him.

He never beat about the bush. "Hullo, George. I understand you've got one of my boys staying here."

The whole male colored population of Australia were his boys. Looking at him, I thought he'd probably be a better father to them than most of their own.

"Hullo, Rev. Yeah, a boy from up north. I'm letting him stay here while Tracker Torrence trains him."

The Rev kept smiling. "I'll get him to come out to my place for tea one night. Have a yarn to him. See what he's going to do down here as well as fight." He

Tracker scowled. "What's so special about her?"

"Watch her do her act and you'll find out. She'd make Gypsy Rose Lee look like Evangeline Booth."

Tracker scowled again. "Ace is trouble. Bad trouble."

I nodded. "Don't I know it. But I don't want to try eating my meals with just my gums. And, besides, Ace picks up and drops women like hot rivets. I think he'll move out soon. Until then he's a taipan I don't want to stir up."

Tracker started to growl something and then stopped. I said, "That's it, oldtimer. Let's just try and see if we can make a tiger out of that antelope." I nodded to the kid.

But as I went out I was thinking — after a couple of fights Tracker will still be a Kearns looking for a Dempsey . . .

It was like I thought it would be. The first fight the kid had looked like a final in a ballroom waltzing championship. The crowd was making rude noises halfway through. The kid won it from Ballarat to Bourke but the reception he got you would have thought he had been caught beating up an old lady in a dark alley.

The dressing room was like a graveyard. The kid looked hurt and puzzled and Tracker just moved around without saying anything. I walked in and looked at Tracker. "Well?"

He looked across at me. He



"Yes, I have a request . . . will you please get the hell out of here."

mumbled, "We'll do better next time. He was hard to hit."

"Tommy Johnson? My Aunt Fanny could hit him. The trouble is, like Joe here, she couldn't hit him hard enough."

The kid shot a quick, hurt look at me. Tracker growled, "We'll work on the heavy bag. And get us, a couple of big heavy spar partners."

I was feeling nasty. "Better than that — I'll sew a couple of rocks in his gloves." I slammed the door going out. It was like digging for gold and finding out once again all you'd done was dig a hole in the ground.

I didn't see the next one. I listened to it on the radio and if anything it was worse. I could see we did not have Australia's answer to Rocky Graziano.

By this time the kid was all fixed up with one of the girls from the Rev's hostel. She was one of the sweetest kids I'd ever seen — a honey-colored quarter-caste. Their innocence and affection for one another would have made the angels smile.

But I wasn't smiling. I was going around with a face like a hangman. It looked like I was stuck with another fancy dan with whom I wouldn't make peanuts.

It was then Tracker sprang it on me. He came in this night and asked to see me in my office. I said, "If you tell me he's decided to take up painting like Namatjira I'll believe it."

Tracker's eyes slid off mine with a strange, eel-like evasiveness. "I want to take the kid away for a couple of days. Rita's got a place we'd like to go."

I stared. "What is this?" He's in training. We've got another fight coming up — such as it will be."

"Rita's got an idea. We want to try it out."

I said, "What are you yammering about? What's Rita's got to do—"

And then suddenly the thought slithered into my mind like something unclean. I said slowly, "Tracker has sh— talked you into something like she did with that other colored boy that time—that voodoo thing?" I shuddered. "I don't want to see anything like



"Tell him I hate him and I never want to talk to him again . . . and ask if there's any message."

that again. That kid went mad in the ring. He told me about it afterwards. The killing of the cock . . . the spilling of the blood over him—"

I licked suddenly dry lips. "Rita wanted dough bad that time, too. Tracker, cut yourself loose from this witch of Endor. That last time she got in bad with the cops just about finished her in this town with her racket. And now she wants dough bad again and she'll do anything to gouge it out of you and whatever fighter you happen to have."

I shivered. "She's a weirdie and I don't mind admitting she's got an uncanny power. That kid she worked on last time nearly killed that other boy. And after the fight he was a wreck—and dead scared about what had happened."

Tracker said, "This is not just for one fight."

I stared. "You mean she wants to do something that will be — permanent?" I grabbed him by the arm. "Tracker, what has this dame got over you?"

He said slowly, "What she'd have over you if you'd been as much with her as I have."

He turned to go. "We're taking the kid with or without your say-so, George. I'm through with nursing along mugs who couldn't punch their way out of wet paper bags. And we could all use the kind of dough this kid could make for us." He looked back from the door. "We'll bring you back a tiger, George."

I looked after the closing door. I thought, he who mounts a tiger cannot get down. I shuddered again . . .

They came into the gym. Tracker and the kid. I walked over. "Well, you took your time. What did—"

And then I took a look at the kid and stopped dead. The lethal



"Such love scenes! That boy and girl sitting in front of us were great, weren't they?"

twist had come to the mouth, the eyes were the cold marbles of the carnivore. The innocence was gone, seared away in some secret way by Rita. He stood there, silent and cruel, malevolent violence in unwilling restraint.

Tracker looked around. He said in a weird voice, "Put him in with Kelly."

The kid circled Kelly, still silent. There had been an effortless grace about his movements before. Now there was a feline menace about them. Kelly let him have a couple of hard ones.

The kid moved like something streaking through a jungle. In a flash there was blood on the tip of his glove and Kelly was staggering back, eyes gaping, a crimson slit on his cheek. The kid hit him there again and Kelly yelped and went down, his face a slippery scarlet mess. The kid stood over him like something that had leapt from a tree to strike down a victim.

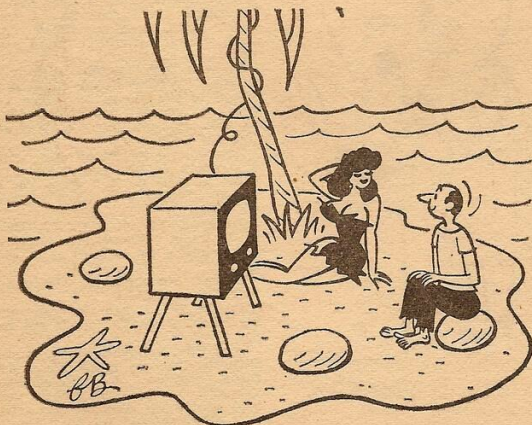
I said sharply, "That's enough. Get him out of there."

Tracker looked at me, haunting evil echoes of what he had seen down there still lurking in the back of his eyes. He said empty, "We brought you back a tiger, George. That's what you always wanted."

I said slowly, "Yeah. That's what I always wanted . . ."

We sent him in first against Sassari, the Italian rock against whom all the local big boys had busted their fists. In the second round he smashed one against Sassari's nose, pulping it against his face. He hit the Italian there again before he went down.

When Sassari staggered up the



"Television gets monotonous, doesn't it?"

kid was on him like a beast finishing off its kill. He smashed the Italian around the face and head with gloves that had suddenly become mauling paws with claws unsheathed. Sassari went down for keeps.

The referee, staring at the kid, moved in to stop the carnage.

Back in the crowd I saw the girl from the Rev's hostel standing on her feet, horror in her eyes, mouth sagging with shock and sudden revulsion.

The kid was finishing dressing when Ace came in. He looked at the kid, his own cruel face admiring him. He nodded. "You got yourself a tiger, George. Also another partner."

I said shortly, "We don't want one."

Ace nodded. "I know you don't, George, but I also know you'd sooner have another partner than your pub business ruined. I've got boys who can start brawls in pub bars over and over again. I've got boys who can beat up the strippers until they all get the message it's not healthy to work for you. I've got boys—"

I said, "So you've got boys. So you want in. How much in?"

Ace smiled. "That's my Georgie-boy. Fifty percent in."

I snapped, "You're out of your greedy mind."

Ace dropped his voice, a danger sign. "I don't think so, George. This kid is building up into a light-heavy. What's around in that division? Nothing. Fat old Archie Moore ruled it for years. Fifty percent of a world champion split between you and Tracker and Rita isn't bad."

I said, "You've got a nerve."

Ace said, "I've also got boys with knuckle-dusters and razors. I even know one with a shotgun. He keeps on the move interstate—but I can hire him anytime. Think it over, George."

When he'd gone I looked across at Tracker. "This is one of the first troubles with having a tiger..."

When I got back to the pub I struck the second. Silvana was just going into her last performance. Most of the strippers are pretty good kids. They nearly all have young boy friends who take them home after the show, most times in a bus or a tram. Jaguars and baldy moneybags pawing them are out.

But Silvana was something else again. She was a tigress with lust and greed and she did her act like she wanted every man in the audience.

I went in and sat down. Tracker had gone to bed. I looked around and there was the kid sitting at a nearby table, slitted eyes running over her. He had never looked at her like that before.

Silvana caught the look and swung toward him, writhing naked hips and breasts. She put a couple of sizzling movements into her act then that would have had the cops closing us right down if they had seen it. The kid's eyes slitted down further and the tongue that seemed to have narrow-

ed and tightened down like the rest of his features ran around his cruel lips.

After she had finished her act I saw Silvana come out and sit down at his table. He reached across and slid his hand over hers and I knew the girl at the hostel was forgotten.

This, I thought grimly, was going to be great. Ace and this pair.

I thought that was as tough as it could get. But that was before the Bilney fight.

Bilney was as tough as a Mallee root. Also he had been around for a while and he had class and performance. We thought he would show us just how far the kid had come along.

It was a good match until the fourth round. They were belting one another stupid and the crowd was loving it, roaring with every punch.

But then the kid got the big one in. It cracked against Bilney's chin and he went down like a surfer buried under a big wave.

But he had the stuff in him that makes a good fighter keep getting up, so he got up. The kid moved in, gloves moving like clubs with razor edges. He chopped and

slashed and tore and slammed and Bilney staggered around.

He finally went down, blind and blood-smeared, and that was it. They got him to his corner and patted the kid and the crowd kept roaring. Suddenly Bilney's trainer took his hand away from his fighter's heart and pulse and screaming, tried to get across the ring and strangle the kid. His fighter was dead...

The last show was over and the strippers had gone home. I sat at a table alone, drinking, and thinking about it.

Tracker came in with Rita and walked over to me. I looked up at her. "What have you let loose? What did you do down there that time you took him away?"

Rita kept looking at me, eyes glittering, and my stomach turned over when I could see she was revelling in what she had proved she had the power to unchain.

Ace walked in. He flashed his snaky grin at me. "Great, George, great. This kid's going places. The papers will scream, the reformers will yell. Then it will all die down."

(Continued on page 43)



"Hi, Dolly!"

SADDLE JOB

FICTION • DOC WINCHESTER

Some gents wear another
man's saddle and spur marks
right into their graves—
but the Kid was willing to
trade his life for his own —

It was hot and dusty when Freighters Evans's Kid rode up with two half-breeds. The three wanted work.

"What can you fellers do?" John Mantril asked.

"We want saddle work," the breed known as Medicine Joe spoke up. By his braided hair and beady eyes, he stacked up a lot more Injun than white man. The other breed had a hatchet face and he might have been related to the devil himself. He was known as Two-time Charley.

Both breeds were young, but compared with Kid Evans, they were a couple of old hands. The Kid was around 16.

"Got all the punchers I can get along with," Mantril said, pouring a stream of Durham into a rice paper. "None of them, though, don't take to a posthole digger very strong. I got 10 miles of line fence to build, if you boys want to tie it in."

The poker faces of these two breeds didn't show much, but you could feel the disgust sticking out all over them.

"We mabyso hunt wolf," Medicine Joe suggested.

Two-time Charley's face improved a little. "You got heap pile sucking calf — you mabyso don't like 'em lobo. We kill lobo plenty."

"Got 'em trappers too plenty," Mantril answered. "No catch 'em posthole digger."

Both breeds looked nasty. "We catch 'em saddle job," Medicine Joe grunted, and he pointed over the hill to sheep country. He swung his horse and Two-time Charley followed him.

"You come back for fall round-up," John Mantril called. He didn't want them to think that their being breeds stood in their way. Mantril was like that—he'd

give anybody a job, once. The fact was he was overhanded right now, that is in everything but fence builders. The Sandstone Ranch punchers were a selected bunch of cow nurses, and Mantril encouraged them to be that way. Unlike most cow outfits, the Sandstone didn't expect its riders to do chores around the ranch between round-ups.

The Evans Kid started to follow the two breeds off, then turned and came back.

"Will you hire me for that job, Mr Mantril?" The Kid had a reddish mop of hair that needed cutting. There was a little fuzz on his chin and the sides of his face, which showed he'd shaved at about the time of his last hair trim. His eyes were a light blue and they looked sky-color against the tan of his face.

"Think you can handle the job?" John Mantril asked.

"It don't take any brains to dig postholes," the Kid answered. "Maybe I can't do as much work as a man, but you can pay me for what I do and that'll suit me."

"That's fair enough — throw your horse in the feed corral. You can start after dinner."

"All I want," the Kid grinned, showing his white teeth, "is to get enough to buy me a new saddle!"

Mantril watched him ride to the corrals and throw his old, stiff-skirted hull over the top pole.

After the Kid had hayed his horse he meandered to the cook shack.

"You're all hell set to get a saddle job, Kid," John Mantril said, coming up to where the Kid waited with the ranch hands for dinner.

"Yessir! Once I get me a saddle with a steel nubbins and a swell fork, I'll never do another lick but ride!"

There didn't seem anything prophetic in the Kid's words. They couldn't have meant anything at the time, because he didn't know just the way his words would fit into a pattern that was his destiny.

That night the Kid spread out his saddle blanket in the bunkhouse, which was the nearest thing to a home he had ever known.

"Mr Mantril is the only man in the world I'd dig them damn

postholes for," the Kid said, stretching out and looking at his skinned hands. "What do you do on the ranch?" he went on, speaking to an oldster whose bunk was near.

"Oh, this, that, an' somethin' else," Sacramento Pete answered, appraising the Kid out of his faded-out eyes. "Gettin' too old to stomp broncs, or ride farther than to town. Guess you'd say I was sorter on a pension." Sacramento had ridden for Mantril's father before John was born.

"Did you ever swing one of them diggers?"

"Never heard of a fence, till right recent." Sacramento rolled a brown paper cigarette.

"Like to go back to them days right now," the Kid said.

But the Kid didn't pack a grudge. He had taken a liking to John Mantril, and his wife, Ella. Ella was 25 and she got to mothering the lone youngster, like having him in the house to eat instead of the cook shack.

"They treat me like I was somebody." The Kid was half talking to himself. "No matter what happens, I'll never do anything to hurt them."

"I don't think you'd hurt anybody very bad," Sacramento offered.

"Not anybody here, not anybody on the Sandstone."

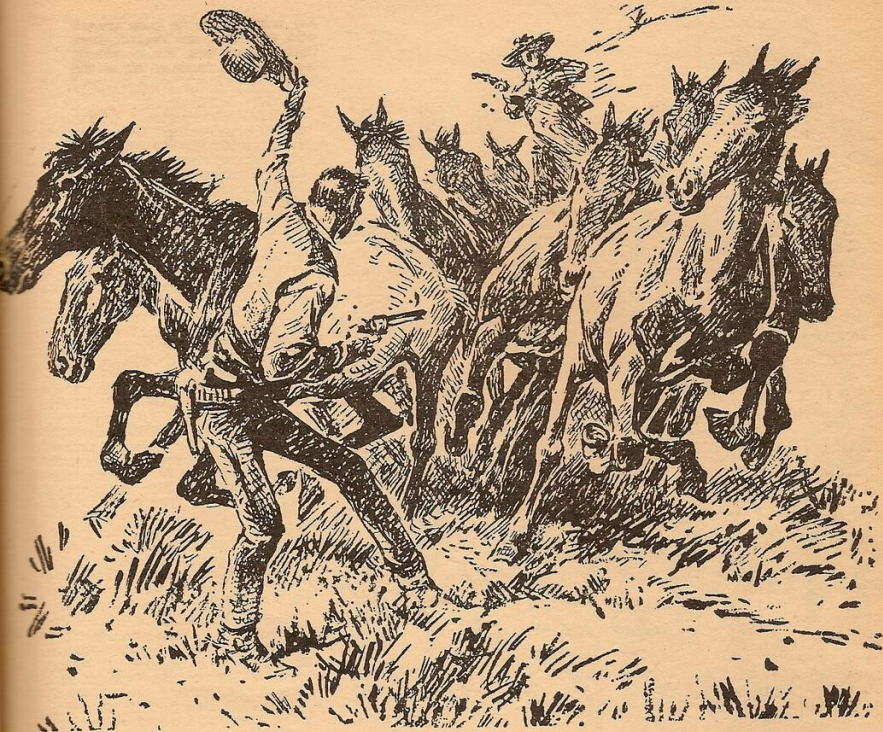
Sacramento remembered those words, too, though the Kid couldn't have had anything on his mind apart from being fed up with the line fence.

"He's one of the best workers you ever had," Ella told John, after the Kid had eaten dinner the next day and gone back to his job. "Can't you find something lighter for him to do? His hands are raw, and he's so tired he can't eat."

"He wanted the job," John said defensively. "He don't have to kill himself at it. I told him to take it easy. It's his own idea the way he's digging into the job."

"You know why he's digging in," Ella said. "He wants that new saddle."

John shot a glance at his wife. She was still pretty in spite of the deep tan that darkened her skin, and the sunburn on her blonde hair. He knew she was re-



membering back to the time they had decided to live their life on the Sandstone, because, he, John, wanted a saddle job!

John tipped up her chin and looked into her eyes.

"A little fence building won't hurt the Kid, Ella. He needs to toughen up — fill out, and get some meat on his bones." Kissing her, he walked out.

The Kid stuck with the line fence and never mentioned a saddle job in spite of the punchers beginning to come into the ranch from spring branding. Having been kicked from pillar to post during his 16 years, he had learned to take what life offered without complaining. But there was deep hurt in the Kid's heart that Sacramento, more than the others, knew to be there. The old puncher watched the youngster, saw the exhaustion and utter monotony of his job, and often went to the rim of the hill where the Kid worked in order to be company.

On one of these trips, Sacramento, sitting on a pile of fence posts, looked at the stooped form of the Kid, bent to his labors. Sacramento fished a brown paper

out of his pocket, his puckered, faded eyes riveted to the boy.

"Looked like Medicine Joe paid you a call," Sacramento offered.

"It was," the Kid answered a little sullen, and not bothering to look at the old man.

"Poor company," Sacramento went on, cupping a match to his smoke.

"Suits me," the Kid replied, his back turned.

The next morning after breakfast, the Kid said goodbye to everyone.

"I like here," he said, a little shamefaced, "but I can't dig another posthole."

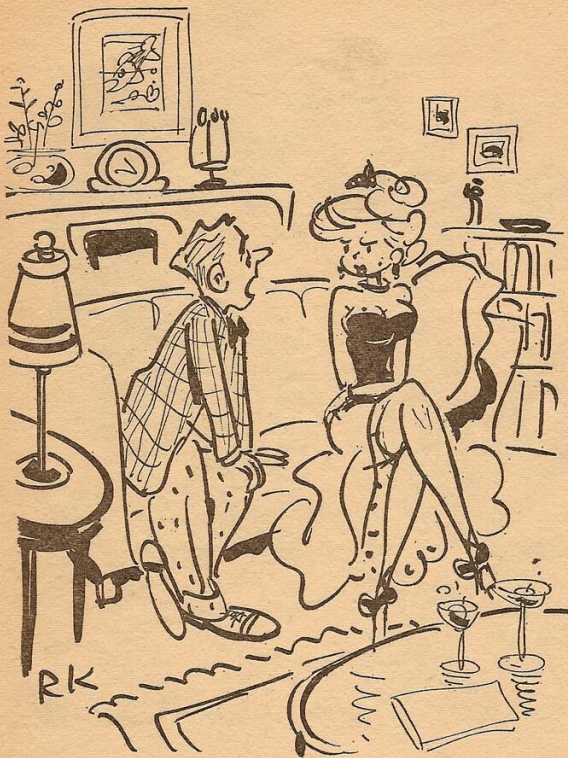
John Mantril tried to talk to him, but the Kid kept on walking toward the corral to pick up his horse and his sorry saddle. Sacramento followed him, hoping to get in a word. He hated to see the youngster throw in with the two breeds again, making a pretty good job of reading the Kid's mind.

On his horse the Kid looked down at the oldest he had bunked with, then toward the house where Ella stood in the door. His face drew out of shape like some 10-year-old getting ready to bawl.

But even Ella, standing with her rope-colored hair in the sun, couldn't hold him. His face twisted even more as he swung his horse and headed out the gate. He had made no mention of where he was going.

It was Sacramento who first heard of the Kid by way of the sagebrush telegraph. Medicine Joe and Two-time Charley were camped beyond Antelope Creek with two thousand head of stolen sheep. The Kid was with them. In addition to the two horses they had ridden to the Sandstone Ranch, they had ten other head they had stolen since. It took a lot of riding to drive sheep without dogs, and the Kid had a saddle job.

Most of Sacramento's news came from a Piegan buck called Reel Foot. Reel Foot claimed he'd been with Red Cloud on the Little Big Horn, and his twisted hoof came from Custer lead. Reel Foot savvied white man's lingo, and Sacramento bribed him to camp on the Kid's trail. For ranch grub, the crippled old Piegan would have butchered his mother. A lot of nights that fol-



"I'm all mixed up! If this is Thursday you shouldn't be Mildred . . . but you are!"

lowed, Reel Foot lay within 20 feet of the Kid's fire, and listened to everything that passed between the youngster and the breeds.

One morning Reel Foot brought the news that the Kid had refused to steal Sandstone horses. This had resulted in an argument in which Medicine Joe told the Kid he was a natural born sheepherder.

"You herd the sheep, White Dog, me steal 'em horses!" Medicine Joe had said.

"You won't steal any Sandstone horses Joe — not while I'm around!" Medicine Joe had drawn a knife on the Kid, but he got his bluff called. The Kid had backed him down with a six-shooter.

The Kid stayed on with the breed outfit as a hand. He refused to have any part of stealing. Moving the sheep north was a saddle job, and that was all the Kid wanted. There'd come a day when he could buy a new saddle, and then he'd quit the outfit. He'd be a top hand on some cow out-

fit — it might even be the Sandstone!

The next day when the two breeds came with six head of horses they stole, the Kid looked them over for brands. There wasn't a Sandstone brand in the lot.

"You like 'em Sandstone," Medicine Joe had said one night. "Why you herd sheep. Why you not stay Sandstone ranch?"

"No like 'em postholes," the Kid answered.

That was something Medicine Joe could savvy.

Almost every morning Reel Foot had something new from the breed camp. According to the old Plegan, the breeds had raised their count of stolen sheep to three thousand head.

"How come you savvy?" Sacramento asked Reel Foot. He knew the Injun couldn't count past his fingers.

"Me savvy lingo. Make 'em vamous talk—pronto."

Sacramento knew that Medicine

Joe wasn't going to hang around with three thousand head of sheep that couldn't help but be missed, even from a ranch as big as the Moon Sheep Company. If he could could think up some way to get the Kid out of it . . .

Reel Foot reported a white man in the breed camp. This man had ridden in during one of Reel Foot's vigilant watches. He was a big, beefy hombre, and he informed Medicine Joe he wanted a cut in the outfit. He had four head of horses, hair vented under a wet gunny sack. He figured the cayuses ought to buy him a four-way split in the sheep.

Medicine Joe went blank on him for a while, then agreed. This jasper, Sacramento figured, couldn't have been too bright in the head. A man that would ride in on Medicine Joe and ask for a share in his steal, was sure asking for trouble.

The next morning they began to move across the badlands. There would be two days, as sheep move, without water. Reel Foot brought the news that they'd broken camp at daylight. There was no grass in the badlands, and even sagebrush was thin. The camp would move to water, then wait for the sheep.

It was the Kid's job to go on with the horses and camp outfit. The new man refused to remain with Medicine Joe and Two-time Charley. He wanted to go on with the Kid.

Reel Foot, hid behind a rimrock, his horse in a coulee, watched the Kid string out the horses. It was Reel Foot who brought the story back to Sacramento Pete at the Sandstone Ranch.

The Kid, riding with the new white man, was about a hundred yards from the camp when a rifle cracked. Smoke curled up from Medicine Joe's gun and the heavy bulk of the newcomer rolled to the ground. Dust rose as his horse jumped clear, then went on, empty-saddled.

The Kid looked down at the man who lay as he had fallen. He must have been dead before he hit the ground, as the bullet hole between his shoulders must have led to his heart. The Kid waited for Medicine Joe to ride up. The breed came on foot, his rifle in one hand, a shovel in the other.

The Kid had a sickly, grey look. Two-time Charley rode up and he didn't look any better than the Kid.

"This killing ain't going to help any," the Kid said, watching the two dig a hole for the dead man.

"Drive 'em sheep over grave," Medicine Joe stated, dragging his shirt sleeve over his forehead. "Sheriff no find 'em."

The Kid watched for a while then went on with the horses.

Back at the ranch, Sacramento Pete told John Mantril he was going after the Kid.

"Don't say anything to Ella," Mantril said. "I don't want her to know the Kid is hooked up with these breeds."

"I know about where they'll camp," Sacramento said. "I'll take Reel Foot along, and we'll catch the Kid before the breeds show up with the sheep."

"I'd go along," John said, "But I got a couple of cattle buyers coming in at noon. Look out for those breeds — they won't like you hornin' in on them."

Sacramento forgot about how old and crippled he was. It was a long swing around the badlands, but they covered the ground fast, keeping the dust of the moving sheep band far to their right.

It was night when they hit the Little Proposure. The small stream cut like a ribbon of silver across the desert in the moonlight. Reel Foot said they had better quit their horses and take it on foot. The Kid would be a little snakey about horse sounds.

Spotting the orange glow of the Kid's fire, they eased along through the sandstone formation and the rabbit brush that grew close to the creek. They saw him spill coffee into his cup, then sit on his boot heels and sip it. By the firelight they could see the pack dump, the old warped hull the Kid rode, and his pitiful, thin bed roll.

Then Sacramento heard a sound that tightened his throat to a dull ache. The Kid was bawling like some six-year-old. Yet there was something about the sound that wasn't like a kid. It was more like a man sobbing out his heart-searing grief alone.

"Don't shoot, Kid. It's me, Sacramento Pete."

The Kid came to his feet, but he made no move for his gun.



"Penbrook, if there's one thing we can do without around here, it's an office clown!"

He dug both knuckles of his hands into his eyes.

"What you two want?" The Kid asked, spotting Reel Foot.

"We want you back on the ranch, Kid. You ain't mixed up in this sheep steal — you just been working for wages. And you weren't mixed up in that shooting."

"What shooting you talking about?" The Kid tightened up. Sacramento could see he wasn't

going to spill anything about Medicine Joe.

"It don't matter about that, anyway," Sacramento said. Then he decided to turn up his hole card. "I'll tell you what we're here for, Kid. John's wife, Ella. She wants you to come back!"

"You're a damned liar, Pete!" The Kid's voice turned raspy. "She don't care anything about me—or you either."

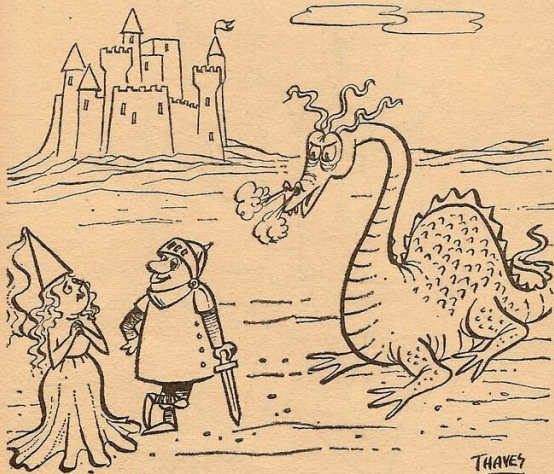
"She thinks well of you, Kid. She's been working on John ever since you took out. She says you're to have that saddle job."

"I got a saddle job," the Kid answered, and there was a bitter finality in his words. "You go back to the ranch and tell 'em that, Pete. Tell 'em I got me a saddle job!"

Sacramento kept on talking, easy like. The Kid was like a green bronc. He had to be hackamore broke, and rubbed down with a blanket before you could get a saddle on him. Sacramento didn't know how daylight was going to help, but he waited for it. The Kid wasn't only a bronc, he was knothheaded to boot. Sacramento began to angle around a position where he could hit the Kid over the head with his six-shooter. If he couldn't get him back to the ranch one way, he would another — haul him in belly down over his sorry-looking saddle.

It turned out that daylight brought more than Sacramento expected. The grey streak in the sky paled the fire, and swept the badlands with a golden glow of eerie light. In which light they saw horses.

The dust cloud took on the color of the sun as it rose high in the thin air. It hung in thin curves, then lifted to where it faded out in a red mist.



"Suppose I knock off this dragon for you, baby . . . what's in it for me?"



"What business is it of his how well we're covered?"

It was the Kid's eye that spotted the horses. His face went white.

The hoof sounds of the running horses could be heard like a low sound of thunder. Well ahead of the dust, they could be seen with their heads high, their tails up, covering the ground in swinging loops. In the lead was Ella's zebra-striped paint!

"Dawn them!" the Kid said, low voiced. "Damn their dirty breed souls to hell!"

The Kid lifted his six-shooter. "Get back in the brush, you fellers, this is my fight." Thumb lapping the hammer of his gun, he walked towards the onrush of running stock. Swinging his hat with his left hand, the Kid split the herd and swung them around him, leaving him enveloped in the middle of a blinding billow of flying dirt.

The form of Medicine Joe was a dim outline through the thick haze, six-shooter lifted, his body bent over his horse's neck. Medicine Joe's gun barked, spat a red line through the cloud bank, and the Kid rocked on his heels. He fell to his knees, then the ground slapped him hard. He struggled to his feet and triggered a shot that rolled Medicine Joe from his horse.

Sacramento couldn't see through the bank of rolling dirt. He hobbled on his crippled legs, his gnarled old hand gripping his gun butt, trying to side the Kid. He heard the Kid's shot, but couldn't see Medicine Joe hit the dirt. The dust was still thick.

Sacramento felt his hat jerked from his head like it had been pawed off by a horse. The explosion of a gun was so close Sacramento felt his eardrums deaden with the sound. Then the Kid's gun ploughed a hole through the dust and Two-time Charley fell so hard he bounced.

"I got 'em! I got 'em both!" the

Kid yelled. "I sent both them sons to hell."

"You sure did, Kid!" Sacramento yelled back. "This Two-time Charley feller is dead as a bloated cow."

"I got 'em both by myself!" the Kid managed to get out. Then he fainted.

Sacramento and Reel Foot carried the limp Kid to the creek where they washed his wounds and dressed them with flour sack bandages. After a while the Kid opened his eyes. He grinned when he saw Sacramento.

"You take it easy, Kid. Me and Reel Foot'll get them horses back to the ranch okay."

"Like hell you will, Pete. I'm taking 'em back myself. The Kid talked like he was a tough hand."

Sacramento grinned back at him. "Sure, Kid. You fog 'em back. Me and old Reel Foot here will trail along behind."

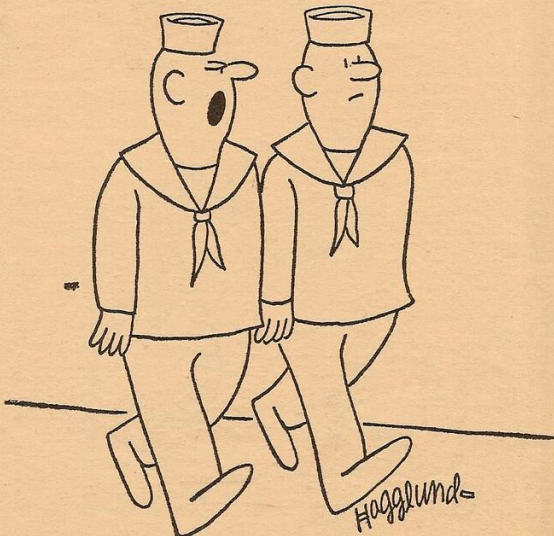
When Sacramento got back to the ranch the Kid was unconscious from the shock and loss of blood. The doc had been out and fished the lead out of him. John and Ella had fixed him a bed in the living room and old Sacramento tiptoed in to see him. The Kid's tumbleweed hair was spread all over the clean white pillow, and he was sleeping normal.

"We'll have to shear him next," Sacramento said. "He's got more wool than two Moon sheep!"

"He'll be a nice looking boy when he gets a haircut and a shave," Ella said. She had taken over the nursing and the Kid didn't stand a chance of dying off on her.

John Mantril came in lugging a Miles City saddle. It had a silver horn, swell fork like a bronc-stomper uses, and the skirt was inlaid with silver designs.

"This ought to suit any horse wrangler," John said, putting the top-hand saddle down by the Kid's



"I have a girl in every port, but I don't think there's one of them that doesn't have a sailor on every ship."

bed. "He'll probably want to sleep with it."
 "You see the sheriff in town, John?" Sacramento asked.

"I saw him, and the Kid is to get the reward on the two breeds. They are both wanted for murder."

"How come they got at the horses?"

John made a sign for Sacramento to keep his mouth shut, but Ella caught it.

"Let's not have any secrets," Ella said, then shooed both men out of the room. There was a chance of the Kid hearing something he shouldn't.

In the kitchen John Mantril explained. A bunch of men from the Moon Sheep Ranch had trailed the stolen sheep and, with rifles, they had forced the two breeds to abandon the herd.

It was John Mantril who framed the horse steal for the two sheep thieves. Seeing them taking across country, he had rounded up a remuda of about twenty head and threw them ahead of the breeds where they could be picked up easily.

"It was the only way we could get the Kid back, Ella," John explained. "He had to do something to save his face. The Kid's proud, and he never would have come back unless he could do it with honor. That Kid's got the makings of a top hand, and I'm going to put him on the payroll as horse wrangler!"

That was how Kid Evans got on the Sandstone. Two weeks later he went to town for new clothes. He was a little unsteady on his pins, and his face was white from his long stretch in bed. Ella and John watched him ride off with Sacramento. They made the old puncher promise he would bring the Kid back before night. The Kid was riding his new saddle for the first time.

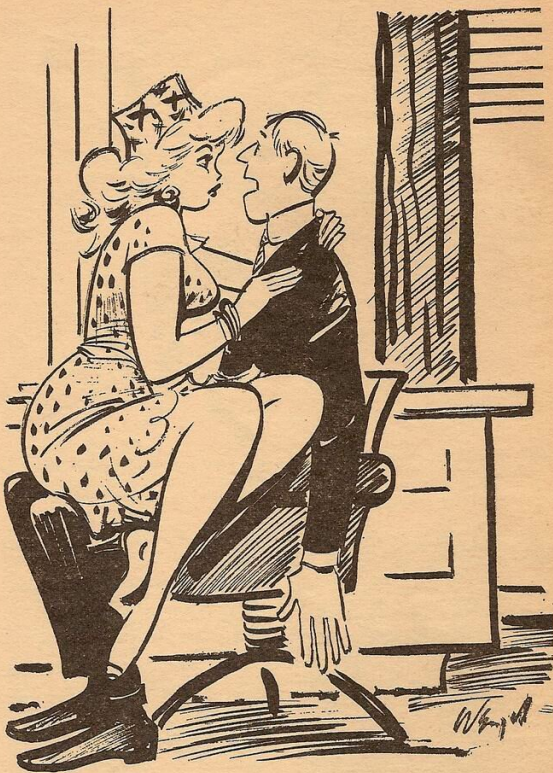
They wouldn't have known the Kid when he returned if old Sacramento hadn't swore it was him.

"I don't know how useful the Kid'll turn out to be," the old brum peeler stated, "but he's plumb ornamental."

And the Kid certainly was! He had collected his reward from the sheriff's office and shot the works on an outfit. His hair was cut, and his face shaved. His hat was a narrow-rim Stetson with a rattlesnake hat band. His boots were bench made, with extra long heels. He packed a 65 foot rawhide rope, and his spurs and bridle were inlaid silver, the bit being a fine Spanish spade.

The quadiest part of his fancy layout was his gun.

It was a .45 Colt, silverplated and chased with gold, the handles being ivory, with a bull head engraved. He had leather cuffs with silver decorations you could see your face in. Wrapped in the new slicker behind his saddle were presents for Ella and John. To Sacramento he had already given a



"Can't you wait until we get home, Dear . . . suppose my secretary should walk in?"

suit of store clothes that he figured was a white man's hardness.

When the Kid headed for the corral with all this silver on, he blazed like a piece of jewellery.

"Me kinda hurts your eyes," Sacramento said, watching the Kid ride away, "but give him time and he'll know what the cow says to her calf."

Ella's eyes softened as she looked at John. She was remembering when John first called on her. He was decked out even worse than the Kid, and you could have seen him for miles.

John had a sickly grin on his face when he read his wife's mind.

"Hell," he said, "I never looked like that, Ella."

"No," Ella said, making a duck for the porch, "but give the Kid time and he'll make the grade!"

John made a grab for her, but she slammed the door and locked it.

PEDAL TILL YOU DROP

(Continued from page 19)

As they assembled for the start, they grinned into the cameras. It was expected of them by their fans. They were champions and couldn't show how much they hurt. As it was, they had been living on pride for more than a week.

Go!
 Anquetil was wearing the yellow jersey (his third day with it) and had to fight his way from the rear. No one was making room for him — Anquetil was already ahead on the clock and 100,000 dollars were at stake.

From the start the pace was torrid. Every man was pressing. The pack stretched and thinned to a long column bending around the road. Far ahead lay Paris, victory, wealth — for the winner.

Jacquot put on quick spurts, got around a few riders, a few more, kept grinding out the miles, forg-



"It's my old trouble again, doctor . . . want me to bring her down to your office?"

ing for the head of the column. He was in the middle, taking dead aim on the leader, hugging the inside of the road.

A dead flat section on the road to Paris, the farmlands of central France. Here the racers really put on the pressure. Sweat streaming from them, they bent over their bikes and pedaled furiously. Anquetil was up there, racing the clock in his head, improving his chances for final victory.

A man down! A fall. Bodies tripping over him, hurtling through the air, hitting the gravelled road with sickening thuds. A and bikes sticking out like logs in a jam. In the middle of it, a pile up, with arms and legs and yellow jersey—Jacquot!

Screams and curses came from the middle of the pile as men fought free. The last of the racing pack went whirling past as they disentangled themselves. Jacquot was one of the first on his feet. He pulled his bike clear, hopped on it—and stopped.

The wheels were bent, his bike was ruined. He whipped off his yellow jersey and swung it high overhead, summoning assistance. Cars and motorcycles were already roaring up. Two mechanics jumped out and hammered at Jacquot's wheels. He howled at them. Hurry! Hurry!

No good. The bike couldn't be repaired. They threw another at him—whose, he didn't know. But he did know that it hadn't been adjusted for his style, that the seat height was different, that the bike wasn't familiarly *his*.

His left knee ripped in two places, his elbow torn to the bone, strength was dripping out of him—and the racing column was out of sight. But he straddled that

strange bike and took off after them. Jacquot wasn't through—not yet.

His last reserves of energy long expended, he plunged ahead on sheer willpower. Somehow he had to flag his thin body for a prodigious effort . . . to make a 100-mile burst.

There was the rear of the column. He was catching them. Push! Push! The kilometre posts on the road to Paris flashed past. Could he make it? Could he fight his way through the pack again?

He had to. Determination re-energised him. The greatest champions in Europe, in the world, were far in front of him giving it a last-desperation gasp. They had no sympathy for him because he fell; that was part of "the breaks of the game". They were out to win. So was he.

Up, up, he fought. Past the last man. Past another. Past a group of them. Breath was whistling in and out of Jacquot now. He had strained himself so severely that he had trouble seeing. But he could pedal his way past a few more now and—

—and there was Freddie Bahamontes. The Eagle of Toledo had torn the heart out of himself in the mountains, was reeling in the saddle now. But by passing him, how far up front did that put Anquetil? He didn't know, but he was passing through the southern suburbs of Paris. Not much left to the race.

The Park of Princes in Paris was jammed to the wooden roof. Every eye watched the open entrance. Here the first cyclist would appear. Loudspeakers belted over the noisy throng, keeping them advised of latest developments.

The knowledgeable had out their

newspapers and writing pads with long columns of figures on them. The big money went to the man who completed the 22-day torture run in the shortest possible time and these *aficionados* were checking their watches, counting every second, ready to time each man as he sped across the finish line. "Here they come!" blared the loudspeakers.

A flash of color, a flash of light, and the first cyclist appeared. The crowd surged to its feet in a thunderous roar of approval. No nationalism here, only admiration. The man was Rino Benedetti, the Italian who had been trying desperately to obtain just one win. He had come close, but never made it—and now on this last day, he had racked up a triumph. With hand raised in victory, he broke the ribbon across the finish line while the audience howled its welcome.

Then all eyes went back to the clock, to the figures. How did Benedetti do in total time? . . . Very bad. Forget him.

The racers were coming in fast now. Pencils flew and fingers ripped up and down adding machines.

Oh, oh. Here comes Planckaert, that tough Belgian. Quick, clock him!

Got him! Here's bad news. He completed the Tour in 114 hours and 36 . . . make it 37 minutes.

All eyes to clocks again. Where was Anquetil? Every ticking second was draining time from his lead. All those precious minutes he had stored up for 22 days were draining away. Where was he? Where was he?

Jacquot came bursting into the Park, right behind Ercole Baldini, forcing that Italian champion to fight every foot. As Anquetil lunged across the finish line, the crowd went wild. He was mobbed, buried under a surging mass of bodies, tossed from arm to arm, kissed, hugged, pummelled.

Jacquot, their beloved Jacquot had done it. He had won by a fat five minutes!

Bleeding, hurting, he took it all and smiled. Never had victory been so sweet. Against everything, he had won—his third win. From now on Jacques Anquetil had to be counted among the bicycling immortals of the world.

There were other champions crowned that day. No one could take away from Rino Benedetti the thrill of having the Park of Princes cheer him, and only him, as he came in first for the last day's event. That was worth almost seven hours of torture on a bicycle.

Bahamontes, Eagle of Toledo, was still King of the Mountains. And Pauwels, the dauntless Belgian, received a special award—the "super-combatant" prize for staying in there when the going was roughest.

Ninety-four men came racing into the Park that day. Every man who finished had conquered the toughest bicycle grind in Europe.

TO RIDE A TIGER

(Continued from page 35)

"We'll take the title off with him and take him overseas. We're in."

I said, "What about Bilney? He's out. As far out as you can get."

Ace grinned. "C'est la guerre. And boxing is war."

The cops were finally through with the kid, too, and he came in. On his arm was Silvana, her tigress eyes glittering with the thought that she was being wooed by a killer.

Ace stiffened, his sleek hair looking suddenly like the spreading head of a cobra.

The kid looked right at him. He said softly, "This is my girl now, Ace. If you try to take her back I'll give you what Bilney got."

Ace was silent. The kid kept staring at him, matching his cold deadliness against that of the older man. Ace suddenly slithered back towards the door, a cobra evading a mongoose.

One of the waiters went past, going home. The kid said, "Get us some drinks."

The waiter protested. "But—" The kid said, voice like an unsheathed blade, "Hurry it up."

The waiter took one look at his face and hurried back to the bar. Silvana stroked the kid's arm. She purred, "Don't let's drink all night, honey. We've got more important things to do."

I got up. I said to Tracker, "There's your fighter. Training like a Spartan."

The kid and Silvana had moved away to another table near the bar. Rita said softly, "We'll cash in before he cracks up."

I stared at her. "You knew that when—"

Her eyes glittered at me. "A short life and a merry one. And a profitable one for us."

She turned and walked away with Tracker. I had another drink and then I went upstairs. I was beginning to feel I was a character being written into a horror story . . .

This was the big one. This import had knocked over everything else in sight. There was only the kid left. Stop this tiger and we were in.

Tracker moved around the dressing-room, the silent automaton Rita had made him since they had gone on that trip with the kid. I sat there, just as silent. There was nothing to say. I had always wanted a fighter like this. And I now had him — a monster.

He lay there, eyes closed, cool as ice, relaxing before he went in and did his best to kill another man. They called at the door and he opened his eyes and slid off the table.

Tracker and the other handler grabbed everything and they went up in there.

After a while I got up and went out to watch it. It was as inevitable as the tragic climax in a Greek drama. The Yank was

classy, fast and mean. But he was a carpet snake thinking he could tackle a taipan.

The lights finally picked him out, lying on the canvas, bloody and broken like a man who had jumped from a great height. The crowd went mad over it, the ancient Romans in suits and skirts instead of togas.

After a while I went back to the dressing-room. The kid was leisurely finishing dressing, cold and contemptuous, a fistic Tamerlane heading for endless brutal conquest.

Everyone else but Tracker had left. Tracker stood looking at him silently, in almost trance-like vague wonderment on his face at how he had come to be caught up in this.

Ace slithered through the door. The kid turned toward him and the gun barked twice. The kid stood there for a moment, two scarlet spots slowly coming up on his white shirt. Then he fell.

Ace scuttled out the door. I thought numbly, he really loved that girl.

We got the kid up on the table and I looked at his face. It was a shock. The fang-and-claw look was gone as if some invisible hand had gently wiped it off. The features again bore what Shakespeare called the rose of youth, the ugly cruelty vanished like something we all might have dreamed.

After we had rung the cops

we went back in there and sat down and waited.

I looked over at Tracker. He was suddenly old and shrivelled. I said, "What was it Rita did down there?"

He stared across at me, his eyes empty and wrung-out. His voice suddenly sounded as old as he looked.

"I didn't understand it — it only made me sick. But I read about it when we came back. It's what they call palingenesis. It's regeneration brought about by suggestion. It's a substitution of personality. You invest a living being with the personality, actions, thoughts and gestures of someone dead. You resurrect someone and put them in a living body."

I said slowly, "You mean that Rita called up a — departed spirit and that — that spirit entered into the kid?"

Tracker nodded. I had to know. I licked dry lips. I said, "Who—was—it?"

Tracker stared across at the still kid. His voice came like an unbelievable, eerie echo.

"Battling Siki . . ."

He kept staring at the kid. "But I'll bet she never expected a bullet to end it again this early."

And that's why I said it was a weird one.

And that's why my spine turns to ice every time I think of it. That is also why I have never had another fighter.



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THE JOKER

(Continued from page 5)

The fat man, his excitement dying down, stood there wiping the sweat from his florid face, looking like a man who had cast a die and now had the nasty suspicion that he might not win no matter what number came up.

The Tall Man opened the main gate a bit wider and moved into the alley. He found a spot against the far wall where he could see the shed and the yard, folded his long legs beneath him and sat on his heels. He eased his hat over his eyes and watched the fat man watching him.

The word had gone out to police headquarters to rile, harass, discourage and use every possible means to stamp out illegal book-making, in the hope that by leaning on a few street SP bookies, money would be diverted into legal gambling channels, thereby increasing the yield of the tax gatherers.

The two uniformed constables in the police car were not on the Gaming Squad — their job for that day was merely to park in strategic positions around post times, and report any suspicious flow of unlawful traffic between local hotel and convenient alley. These reports were assessed, collated and summarised. They would one day provide the planners with

the information to organise a vast, co-ordinated raid — a tactical exercise involving spies, men and machines.

These villains were very cunning and would try anything, so when a small, dark, fat male child came running up to them crying that his daddy had caught a bad man, the officers were suspicious. People in that district didn't call the police, they were called upon. If it was a phony call to lure them away from their vantage point, somebody was liable to get charged to explain their absence from the assigned mission. They dumped the child in the front seat and kept him surrounded as they drove to daddy's place.

In the meantime daddy had been chewing his nails. He's cooled down considerably — at least internally — and now he decided he didn't like the situation one little bit. He couldn't understand why the tall man was still there. He'd been more relieved than anything else when his unwanted visitor had left the yard, and had made no move to stop him, but when the Tall Man made himself comfortable and settled down to wait, a large measure of doubt had set in. When a man tries to rob you, is nabbed and then given the opportunity to get away, he should get . . . but he hadn't gotten. The rules in the game are simple, but it was stalemate and the two players, each in his own way, waited for the umpire.

The one who'd made the first move now squatted in the dust with the timeless patience of a bushman. The other stood sweating in the sun, muttering to himself, as he chased around his overheated brain, the more than faint suspicion that there might be a joker wild.

Just then two of them arrived. Umpires, that is, not jokers. They came in the front way following the child — through the shop, the living rooms and on to our stage in a blaze of blue.

The twitching nerves of the fat man galvanised him into action. He galloped toward the nearest constable and gave him a burst of incomprehensible jargon. After a minute or two of this when the torrent of words showed no sign of abating, the constable placed a ham-sized hand on the chest of his would-be informant and backed him off a couple of feet.

He demanded sternly, "Now, what's the trouble here?"

The machine gun stutter of words began again.

The constable knew how to put a stop to that. He leaned forward. "CAN YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?" he roared, emphasising each word clearly and using maximum volume. That was the way to make them understand—bellow at them.

It worked — the fat man had been shouted at before. He shut down the smooth flow of civilised, beautiful language and groped for words in this strange, barbarous tongue. "That man," he pointed to the alley, "he try to steal from me!"

The senior of the two, who up to now had taken no part in the preliminaries, strode across the yard and stood over the relaxed, crouched figure. He observed the sweat-stained clothes, the dusty shoes, the battered hat hiding the face.

"All right, you!" he barked, "stand up!" The bark contained no particular malice. He always spoke that way even when asking his wife to put out the light.

The Tall Man straightened his legs and came upright in one smooth, easy motion as he obeyed the command.

The senior had, what was for him, the unique experience of looking upwards into another's face. He stared into this face with the shy, reserved way that policemen have.

It was a lean, deeply sunburnt face, with level grey eyes shaded by the hat-brim, the skin in the wrinkles around the eyes showing a lighter color in the shade. It was a face to inspire immediate confidence and trust.

The senior hadn't taken anything or anybody on trust for years. "Well," he demanded, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

The Tall Man nodded toward the other player in this drama and said calmly, "He's got a koala tied up in there. I was going to tell him the little beggar'll die, but he



"The trouble with Mr Larson is that he always wrestles with his dictation!"

got excited — you know how these characters are?"

Both policemen knew all about suspects who told them they knew how it was, but in this case they did. They charged toward the shed and banged the door open. The shed was apparently used for storing fruit and vegetables and anything else that lay around. A pile of limp lettuce leaves was strewn on the dirt floor and in the centre of it was tethered a bedraggled, unhappy-looking koala, the cord around its neck buried deep in its fur.

The fat one found himself the focal point of three pairs of accusing eyes. He was bewildered. What was this? He'd spent a considerable amount of time and energy trying to explain to these cops what that accused beanpole had been going to do. The big cop goes over to shout at the long length, and then they all turn and look at him. He spread his arms in supplication. "Whatsa matta?"

The senior sighed. "Look," he said in what he imagined was a reasonable tone of voice, "we've told you people time and time again about the protected birds and animals. It's been in the papers. Your kids are taught in school. You've no excuse for not knowing."

The fat man stared at him. "Whatsa matta?" he pleaded.

A pained expression crossed the senior's face. He brought the said face close to the dark, fat one and enunciated very slowly. "You are not supposed to keep koalas. They will die without the proper food. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?"

If it was to be a contest of expressions the other could play his part. He pulled down the corners of his mouth and pulled up his shoulders into a mimicry of complete non-comprehension.

The next thing he knew, a huge fist fastened on his upper arm and he was propelled rapidly toward the shed. When they got there, a blue-coated arm terminating in an outstretched finger, pointed dramatically to the floor.

A spark of light flickered dimly in the darkness. "Little bear? She's mine. I feed good!"

He'd picked up the pet by the roadside during a visit to one of two hundred country cousins. But why in the name of all that was holy were they bothering about an animal when they could take the credit for the capture of a criminal? He didn't know and there didn't seem to be anybody around who cared to explain it to him in words he could understand. All he knew was that... Tall Man, had, in some mysterious way, diverted attention from himself, to him the injured one, and he was being got at. He knew what the tall man wanted. At the thought, his mercury rose again.

His English hadn't been learned from the natives, it had been picked up third hand from his

compatriots. Now in a moment of crisis when he needed all the persuasive powers at his command, it failed him utterly. He babbled.

The constable heaved a sigh — it was his turn — and in an easy movement that indicated plenty of practice, he whipped out a notebook.

"What's your name?"

This drove the captive into a frenzy. He may not have understood the words, but the gesture with the notebook was unmistakable. He'd committed a grave error in calling the police. He knew that now and he also remembered that he'd been warned...

When he first arrived in this country, the leaders of his community said to him,

"You are a simple man, Guiseppe, and this is what you must do. Stay with your own people, remember your heritage and instruct your children in the old ways. And this is also what you must do. Stay away from the Australians except when they buy from you, for they will call you names and their unions will order you to do things you do not want to do. Stay away from the authorities for they will confuse you with regulations about which you know nothing. They will make you buy licences and pay taxes. But, above all, stay away from the police."

So he'd listened to them. He'd lived with his own people and learned just enough English from them to buy and sell vegetables. He and his family had worked hard. He'd paid no taxes and visited no banks. And up to now everything in the garden had been lovely until this tall weed appeared. His brain reeled with the injustice of it all and then he made his worst blunder. He struggled.

The grip on his arm had not slackened and it was beginning to bug him. He tried to tear loose. His blood pressure was making his eyes bulge again and this time panic was setting in. He wanted to get away, wanted to slam the gate on the tall man, wanted to get the police out of his shed and house, wanted to run somewhere and pour out his troubles to anybody who'd listen. And all he could do was to wave his free arm wildly.

The constable reholstered his notebook and moved in to help. He came too close. The waving arm slapped against his jaw. It was the kind of tap he received from his four-year-old nephew, but it was enough.

In five seconds flat Guiseppe had both his arms pinned and was helpless. He was now thoroughly discredited. Nobody would listen to anything he had to say. The joker had turned up and the game was over for him.

They held him long enough to make sure he'd got the message, then released him. The constable was ordered, "Put him in the car, we'll take him down to the station

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and get someone to pick up the animal."

The fat man was led away subdued. He made one last weak effort to remonstrate, but his fire was nearly out and he'd lost his head of steam. A push in the back kept him going.

The senior walked over to the Tall Man who'd stayed in the alley while all this was going on. "Better give me your name and address," he said.

The Tall Man looked at him with that trust and confidence inspiring face. "Aw, you don't want me do you?" he asked quietly. "He was the one who called you. I'll lose a day's pay if I've got to attend court."

That sounded reasonable to the law. They were going to take Guiseppe to the station, let him meditate awhile, make sure he understood his misdemeanor, then turn him loose. It wasn't anything serious as the culprit should have known if he'd had any sense. This could go in the book as "acting on

information received."

Anyway, it was too hot to worry. He nodded and gave his gracious permission. "All right, you can go."

He swung the gate shut in the Tall Man's face and banged home the latch.

The Tall Man went back to sitting on his heels. He heard a car door slam and a rubber-ruining take-off which indicated the driver was piloting a car somebody else had paid for. Then the background sound effects took over.

He waited 10 minutes to let any nosy neighbors go back to their siestas. Then he opened the gate as he'd done before and entered the shed. Inside, after a short search, he found a rusted metal box under a pile of rotting sacks. It was locked, but the hinge was almost off.

The box was packed with money—which, of course, was what the Tall Man had come for in the first place.

DOUBLE-CROSS THE DEALER

(Continued from page 25)

"Hey, what goes here? We had a deal, Nick. Okay, so five years is a long time, but you got remission. Okay you did your stretch and it was tough but we had a deal."

"Exactly," said Nick in a flat voice. "So let's go and see the safe."

"You won't get away with this," growled Currer after a pause. "You were not to come near me again. I won't forget this."

"Me neither," smiled Nick coldly. "I saw one empty box—in spite of the efforts of your tan shirted friend—and now I'm going to see a full one. The safe, Currer!"

"Tan shirt? What the hell are you talking about?"

"I've finished talking, Currer!" The edge in Nick's voice and the gun turned Currer. Anger and fear had pale his cheek. Without a word he turned to the panelled wall. A panel slid aside to reveal a combination lock. Currer's fingers moved to it.

Dick stayed back. His heart thudded—things were moving well. Soon, the launch, and Carla. All he had to do, once the safe was open, was to tap Currer, not too hard, on the base of the skull. Then he was clear.

Currer was breathing heavily. The locks clicked. The door swung open and Currer's hand slipped inside. Nick eased across, his eyes on the back of Currer's neck and he swivelled his grip on the gun so he could bring it down on Currer.

It was only then that he saw the automatic slipping out from the safe in Currer's hand.

He was too slow, he knew it. His grip on the gun was too high and Currer was turning, flinging out one arm to catch Nick off balance. Staggering, Nick went backwards in a panic, striking the chair and crashing to the floor. He twisted, lunging sideways to avoid the bullet that must come, but it never came.

Currer was still standing there with the automatic pointed at Nick's stomach when Nick's bullet flashed into his head.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Currer's face gone—blood. Nick's arm wrenched under him. He had to get the hell out of there. Nick thrust his hand into the safe. He stared in disbelief at the money in his hand. Fifteen thousand! But Carla had said—the hell with what she had said! He had to get out of there!

He stuffed the money in his jacket pocket, and leapt through the open window. The iron rungs of the fire escape hammered under his feet. He dropped the last 15 feet to the street.

Minutes later the sedan roared through the city streets. Only when he heard the lulling thunder from the beach did Nick's nerves straighten out. He eased off the gas and slid into the parking lot

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"Well, you asked me to take you to a real low-class dive."

above the darkened beach house. That was the arrangement — to all intents and purposes it would be deserted. But Carla was there, waiting.

But only 15,000—hell! He glanced at his watch. One hour 50. He'd made good time from the penthouse. And with luck Currer's body wouldn't be found for hours.

Nick killed the engine, left the car, walked down to the beach house. His feet sounded light on the boards, and he slipped open the door, stepped inside.

"Carla?" And the white hot beam pinned him to the door like a fly.

When he swam back up into a stream of consciousness, Nick heard the siren, felt the leather of the police car seat under his fingers, heard the murmured conversation of the State trooper whose shoulders were wedged against his.

"... it's always the same with these punks. Ya give them a straight one under the heart and they fold. Didn't I tell ya..."

But there was a pain at the base of Nick's skull too. He opened his eyes and memory flooded back. The cops—how the hell did they get there so fast?

"... got the wire from headquarters. Sam told me that Big man Currer looked like he was all set up for some dame up there when this guy walked in and smashed up his face. Beats me how Currer still has the energy to play around when he's shackled up legal with that dame he married last year. Say did you ever

catch her act down at the Sixty Club? ..."

Smashed his face... Nick remembered the look on Currer's face when he stood there, with the gun held out foolishly as Nick's bullet blew half his head away...

That gun... Words... impressions... "Hell, Nick! But you were in prison... Surprise, surprise... "Tan Shirt? What the hell are you talking about?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Nick's head was on fire. Currer, surprised to see him, not expecting to see him again, not even recognising him at first! Currer, not even knowing about Tan Shirt! "We had a deal, Nick," he had said. "We had a deal!" The trooper's shoulder dug into Nick.

"Course," he was saying, "when she married that guy she really thought she was moving into the big time, but friend Currer, he never was the free spending type and talk is she wasn't too happy..."

The redness was on Nick again, the old crazy redness. His fingers clenched—things were fitting into place.

Tan-Shirt, Carla, the penthouse, Carla, the deposit box, Carla, the gun, Currer's gun, the empty gun that Nick hadn't been told about! Carla, Carla, Carla!

"But things should be different now," continued the trooper. "Now this punk's knocked off her old man for a measly 15,000, I guess it will be all high living for Mrs Carla Currer!"

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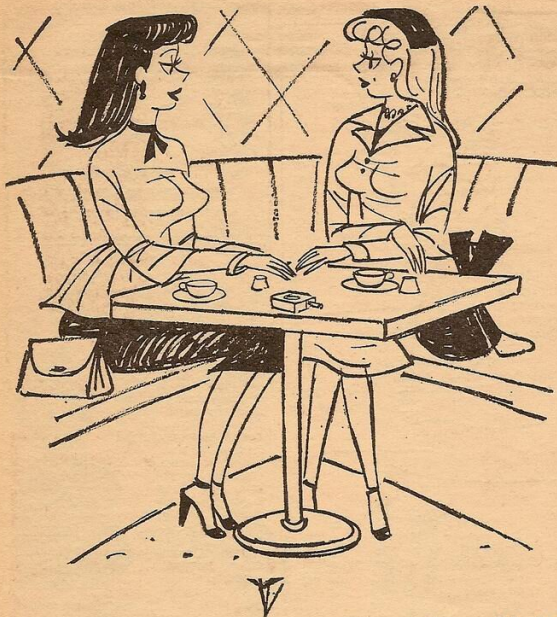
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"... and then, after she married him for his money, discovered he had spent it all on her before they were married!"

ISLAND OF BANISHED BLONDES

(Continued from page 9)

Wyatt finally agreed to the Englishman's plan, mainly because he couldn't think of any practical alternative. And, once more, luck was on their side. Miraculously, they made it back to the coast without running into one of the dozens of Spanish patrols that had to be searching for them by now. It was nearly dawn the next morning when they reached the Moro village 10 miles south of the prison. Dozens of outriggers were lined up on the beach. Stealing one of them would be easy. However, setting out minus food or water was a suicidal notion.

"The fishermen should be shoving off soon," Wyatt said. "Since they're gone all day, they must carry supplies of some sort ... maybe enough to keep us alive until it's safe to put into land further down the coast."

Finally, a lone figure carrying fishing line, a water bottle and a package that probably contained his lunch stepped out of a hut and headed for the boats. "There's always one guy who tries to beat the others to the punch," Wyatt whispered.

When the man passed by their

hiding place in the bush, Wyatt leaped out, clubbed him with the butt of his rifle and dragged the motionless body back out of sight of the village. He grabbed up the man's supplies.

Fortunately none of the other fishermen appeared before they shoved off in a stolen canoe. By the time the morning mists dissipated, they were out of sight of land.

It was the beginning of a two-month island-hopping ordeal that ended with the big blonde girl named Elke ordering them off Onahiu at gunpoint ...

"What now?" Wyatt asked while he and Cargell sat in the bobbing outrigger, well beyond the reef. "Do we try to land someplace else?"

"I don't know of another passage through the reef," Cargell sighed. He swore under his breath. "It's that blasted Elke. She always had the notion that once a man was permitted on the island he was obligated to stay, help build up the population again."

"To hell with all that. What are we going to do? Drift around until we die of thirst or try for another island? There's a chance we can make the Borneo mainland."

"And face a committee of head-hunters?" Cargell muttered. "Not

on your bloody life. It's Onahiu or nothing ... " He broke off, his pale eyes staring at the beach. Wyatt followed his gaze, saw that half a dozen outriggers were moving toward them. They were filled with women — the most spectacular collection of massed feminine beauty the American had ever glimpsed. A few had dark hair but most of them were blondes or redheads. They were close enough now that he could hear their welcoming cries.

"One of the other women must have spotted us!" Cargell bellowed. "We're off the hook! Elke can't buck the whole bunch!"

A few minutes later the outriggers were all around them. Women were leaping overboard and swimming toward the two men's canoe, squirming into it like happy porpoises. "You'll swamp us!" Wyatt yelled as a slim, grinning girl slipped a flowered lei over his head. The inundation of creamy flesh was so heavy he could no longer see Cargell. The girl who had given him the lei grabbed his paddle and began propelling the canoe toward shore.

More women were waiting on the beach. Stunned by the hysterically joyful reception, Wyatt allowed himself to be lifted bodily on to a crude pallet carried by four girls. Other giggling women had rigged up a sunshade by suspending a large piece of cloth between the upheld barrels of the rifles which they all carried. Behind him, Cargell was getting the same treatment. Out of the corner of his eye, Wyatt saw Elke standing away from the others, caressing the stock of her own weapon. Her cornflower blue eyes, blazing with hatred and frustration, briefly met his own.

The girls' village was a 10-minute walk from the shore. At first glance it looked like any other settlement of thatched-roofed, reed-walled huts to be found in the archipelago. However, differences were soon apparent. The central building, for example, was a stark, white-framed structure that wouldn't have been out of place in any small town in northern Sweden. He later learned that it was the village meeting hall. The procession halted in front of it and the pallets were lowered to the ground. A plump, black haired girl ran out of the hall, and threw her arms around Cargell's neck.

"Hello, Mai," he cried, patting her rounded, fleshy form. "You missed me?"

Laughing, she rained kisses on his face and shoulders, then turned to stare curiously at Wyatt with her huge black eyes. "My friend," Cargell said. "Come to stay here with us. He's almost as great a man as I am ..."

Mai, Wyatt soon discovered, was one of the three island girls Cargell had taught to speak English. The others were Elke and Leah, the delicate-featured little honey-blonde who had given Wyatt a lei back in the outrigger. "You must be tired," Leah said,

taking the American's hand "I show you how we take care of tired people on Oahu."

The others roared with merriment as she led him to a windowless hut on the outskirts of the village. To Wyatt's amazement, heavy clouds of water vapor billowed out of the place when she opened the door. The hut was literally a natural steam room, built around one of the volcanically heated springs common to islands in the archipelago. Leah shoved him inside, ordered him to lie down. Suddenly realising how exhausted he really was, he surrendered to the moist comforting heat seeping into his body. He felt Leah's hands on him. "Turn over," she murmured and began gently massaging his back and legs. It was almost as if the fragile hands kneading his flesh were literally rubbing out the horror of his year in Sibuko, pressing life back into his weary body. Soon he was asleep.

That night a feast was held in the meeting hall. Carell shared the place of honor with Wyatt, directly beneath a painting of a stern-faced, mutton-chop-whiskered man in a high collar and black suit. "Gustav Borkman, the Swede who organised the original colony," Carell explained with a chuckle, pointing toward the portrait. "The whole way of life here originated with him. He and his followers tried to establish a utopia. Threw away all the European conventions — private property, marriage, the works."

After the festivities broke up, Wyatt accompanied Leah to her hut, weaving a little from the amount of native mead he had drunk. He blinked in surprise when he entered the one room structure and saw that the walls were draped with strings of orchids, gardenias and hibiscus. "A very special night," the girl said as she unbuttoned his ragged shirt. "It has been many years since I have held a man. I avoided Carell when he was here before. I was afraid of him."

"He's all right," Wyatt said and took her in his arms, exulting at the touch of her warm, silken flesh. The odor of the flowers filled his nostrils.

Later, while they rested, Leah told him more about life on Oahu. "Our only real enemies are the Kawaii tribesmen from the mainland," she said. "Twice since the massacre of our men, small bands have raided the island but we fought them off. Luckily, they don't realise how few of us are left. If they did, they'd send in a large force and probably overwhelm us. Elke is in charge of the defences."

"What's eating her anyway?" Wyatt asked.

"I think she believes that she will lose her own power if too many men come to the island. But she can do nothing as long as the rest of us want you here. And we do."

The next few weeks were like a protracted dream. For the first time in his life Wyatt was liter-

ally inundated with girls — and had unlimited time to enjoy their company. They seemed to pop up everywhere — on the warm beach when he went for a swim, even back in the hills, where he sometimes took long walks. Although the community's century-old rules barred permanent liaisons between men and women, Wyatt and Carell eventually made their homes with Mai and Leah respectively. This arrangement didn't prevent them from taking up with any of the other girls when the mood struck them.

From the beginning, Wyatt was fascinated by the way traces of the community's Nordic heritage still appeared in its daily life. For example, their chief product for trading with the steamers that occasionally anchored off the reef was an oil made from shark liver, an industry previously foreign to this part of the Pacific but long practised in Scandinavia.

One day, after he had been on

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NAME ADDRESS

Onahiu nearly two months, Wyatt asked Elke, who headed the shark fishing expeditions, to take him along the next time she went out. The tall blonde seemed a little surprised at his interest but nodded her agreement.

They left at dawn three days later in a large, flatbottomed boat that resembled no other craft in the South Seas. Built specifically for this kind of fishing, it was so wide that it barely passed through the break in the reef. The crew was made up of Elke, Leah and six other girls. The equipment they brought along baffled him completely. Besides the expected harpoons, it included several rope nooses, some heavy clubs and eight long poles with large, rattling gourds tied to their ends. There was no bait, nor even a rotting fish head or two.

Shortly after 10 o'clock, Elke ordered them to lower the sail. She gazed down intently into the rippled sea, as if her dark blue eyes could actually see more than a few feet beneath the surface. "Here," she grunted at last and stripped off the flowing smock she had worn to protect her light skin from the sun.

The girls picked up the long-handled gourds and, four on each side of the boat, plunged them into the water, shook them vigorously. "Sharks down below, hear the rattles, like a school of small fish moving near the top," Leah explained. "Better than throwing dead meat into water. That way you get only one shark, maybe two. For the gourds, they come from all over."

Impossible as her words sounded, a few minutes later a fin cut the water 20 feet astern. "Aho!" one of the girls cried. It was the Melanesian word for hammerhead shark.

As if participating in a drill, Elke grabbed up one of the looped ropes and Leah seized a club. The other women continued to manipulate the gourds. Now there were other fins—at least half a dozen—circling them. But none approached closer than 10 feet to the boat before darting out again. "Cautious," Elke said irritably. "Too cautious."

Suddenly Wyatt heard a loud splash behind him. Wheeling, he saw to his horror that Leah was

overboard. Without thinking, he dived after her.

"No!" Leah yelled as he swum to her side. Her slim legs were treading water as calmly as if she were in a sheltered pool.

Glimpsing a pair of fins swerving toward them, he grasped her naked waist and pulled her with him, flailing awkwardly with his free right arm. Then the first shark came within inches of them, so close that its rough scales almost brushed the American's side. A spurt of fear-induced energy propelled him and the still-struggling Leah to the side of the boat. Hands quickly pulled them aboard.

To his astonishment, as he lay gasping for breath, he saw that the women—even Leah—were laughing. "I jumped in on purpose," she said. "Sometimes the sharks stay too far out. They are puzzled because they can hear fish and feel the water move but can see nothing..."

"So you give them something to look at?"

"They never strike on the first approach," Elke cut in. "Always two or three passes first. Plenty of time for the girl to get back." She was laughing like the others but there was a look of respect in her eyes when she looked at him, silently acknowledging his courage in going after Leah.

For the next hour, Wyatt kept out of their way. As Elke had predicted, Leah's act had drawn the sharks in. He watched in admiration as the girls speared the huge fish, looped ropes around their thrashing bodies and hauled them in to the side of the boat.

Cargell was waiting on the beach when they returned hours later. The red-bearded Englishman's face was sullen as he walked back to the village with Wyatt. "You're an absolute idiot," he grunted. "Once they get used to the idea of your helping with the work, you'll lose their respect."

Wyatt didn't answer. His friendship with Cargell had survived months in Sibuko prison and the long, hazardous voyage down the archipelago, but now that the danger and pain were behind them, their relationship had become badly strained. They simply began to realise that they didn't like each other.

However, the erratic English-

man could still be pleasant when the right mood was on him. Heavy rains fell for a week after the shark fishing trip. When the weather finally cleared, Cargell entered Wyatt's hut and astonished the American by saying, "A bunch of us are going skinning. Care to come along?"

Since the temperature on Onahiu never went below 70 degrees, even at night, he was dumbfounded by the invitation. All he could do was nod and follow Cargell outside, where Leah, Mai—and the plump, dark-haired girl—and some of the other women were waiting. Slung over their shoulders were highly polished skis carved from teakwood.

It was an hour later before Wyatt fully understood what they had in mind, when they reached the lower slopes of a high hill in the centre of the island. Down its side poured a swiftly moving stream, swollen by the rains of the past week. For hundreds of feet around its course, the heavily cladded ground was slippery and wet.

"Ski on mud?" Wyatt laughed. "Of course," Leah replied in a puzzled voice. "What else could you ski on?"

It took them another half hour to slog to the top of the hill. To Wyatt, the sight of half a dozen semi-naked women strapping on skis under a boiling tropical sun was immensely comic but a few minutes later he was plummeting down the hill in Leah's wake. He realised he was following her too closely when a huge glob of red clay churned up by her skis splattered back into his face, blinding him. In back of him he heard a bellow of laughter from Cargell, just before his left ski hit a rock. His stomach zoomed up against his lungs as he completed a half somersault, landed on his back, and continued to careen down in that position, choking on mud and gravel. The sickening journey ended when he crashed into a scrub palm.

When he had regained his breath and scraped the dirt from his stinging eyes, he looked around for the others. All except Leah had met with similar mishaps and even she was covered in muck from head to foot. Cargell, crawling out of a deep bog hole, looked like some hairy prehistoric monster that had been caught in a tar pit.

"We will clean up in the beer pool," Mai said.

This time Wyatt knew what they were talking about. The "beer pool" was a spring where the jugs of native beer were kept. Soon all of them were splashing in the chilly spring and scraping the mud off each other's bodies. Stirred by the sight of Leah's shining, rose-tinted flesh, Wyatt started to pull her toward shore. But she held back, whispering in his ear. "No, Robert, you must save yourself. Tonight Elke will visit you. She told me this morning that I should sleep in another hut."

The weird social customs on Onahiu occasionally rattled him

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but this was the first time he had ever grown angry. "Wouldn't it have been nice if she'd told me about it first?"

That night, his head still reeling from the beer he had consumed, Wyatt lay awake nervously, watching the moon go down behind the gently waving palm fronds by the window of his hut. Despite himself, he was looking forward to Elke's coming, even though she way she had arranged it injured his pride.

Then she stood in the doorway, her fair skin glowing like fine marble in the dying moonlight. He rose to meet her.

"Get out of here," he said, already wishing he hadn't.

Her jaw dropped. "You aren't serious."

"Oh, yes I am."

"I've seen you looking at me," she said sceptically, tossing her long blonde hair. "From the first, you wanted me more than of the others."

"Sure—but I planned to do the asking."

She cursed and swung at him with a closed fist. He ducked the blow easily and grabbed her around the waist. For a moment, they struggled fiercely, Wyatt forcing her back while she raked his shoulders with her fingernails. Her full breasts heaved against him as they toppled to the dirt floor. Then her hands again touched his shoulders—caressingly now.

To hell with principle, he thought.

Elke didn't leave the hut until late the next morning. A few minutes after her departure, Wyatt made his way to the steam hut. Several of the girls were lounging about the place when he entered.

He was lying near the open door when a shot sounded and a slug ricocheted off a stone only a few inches from his head. With a shout of alarm, he rolled closer to the wall. One of the girls grabbed up her rifle and started for the door but Wyatt wrenched her to his side, just as a hail of shots tore through the walls.

"All of you keep down," he warned.

When there were no more shots in the next two minutes, he crawled over and peered out. Already women from the other huts were running toward them, alerted by the gunfire. The assailant—whoever he or she was—wouldn't be hanging around.

"Who would want to kill me?" Wyatt asked Elke, who was among the first to reach the steam hut.

The answer wasn't long in coming. Elke immediately called a meeting of everyone in the settlement. The single absentee was Ivor Cargell. Minutes later they discovered that one of the outriggers was missing.

"At first I was baffled," Wyatt recalled in a letter written years

later to a friend in North Carolina. "Just the day before we'd gone on that crazy mud skiing trip together, crazily as a couple of puppy dogs. Then I started putting it all together and it made sense. Mai, the only one of the girls Ivor really confided in, told us he'd been worried for weeks that I'd been plotting against him, making plans to kick him off the island and steal his women. She said it came and went. One minute he trusted me—the next, he was convinced I was going to put a knife in him some night. What finally set him off was finding out Elke and I had spent the night together. He figured we'd formed an alliance against him and blew his top. I guess the only real explanation is that he should have been locked up in a madhouse 20 years earlier..."

The fact that Cargell had fled the island relieved Wyatt's nerves until he noticed that Elke had begun to look tense and worried. She finally gave voice to her fears.

"Where did he go, Robert? That is what bothers me. Suppose it was the mainland. Leah has told you about the Kawaii tribe, the natives who killed our men? For years we have live in terror of them. Only the fact that they don't know how few of us survived has kept them from making another big raid."

"And you think Ivor might tip them off about how weak your defences are?" he asked. "To get revenge for what he thinks we've done to him?"

"He speaks their dialect—he knows that they would give him food and shelter in return for his help. But you know him better than any of us here. Is he that crazy?"

Wyatt didn't even have to consider his answer. "Yes, he's that crazy."

Elke immediately tripled the guard on the one navigable passage through the reef. Beyond that, it was simply a matter of waiting. The weeks dragged into a month, then two. Finally, her

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face bright with relief, she told him, "He hasn't done it—or they killed him before he could speak."

The next morning, shortly after dawn, Wyatt was awakened by a strange, forlorn, howling noise. It took him a few seconds to realise that it was the pre-arranged danger signal from the beach lookouts — six long blasts on a conch shell horn.

Five minutes later he and Leah stood with Elke on a low hill overlooking the grey beach. The other young girls of the village — fewer than 20 of them — had dug up among the cocoa palms below Wyatt and stared across the green water, counting the long war canoes moving over the sea half a mile out. "Twenty-six," he muttered at last. "And each of them must carry at least 10 men."

"We have one advantage," Elke said, pointing toward the white-flecked water above the reef. "Only one canoe can make it through the passage at a time."

Twenty-six canoes," he thought ruefully, fear hardening in his belly. The first dozen boats to negotiate the passage would be shot to bits — but enough survivors would make it to the beach to divert some of the girls' fire. After that it would be a rout and massacre of the islanders.

He wrenched his gaze away from the sea, looked toward their own outriggers, lined up just short of the brushline. The only boat anchored in the water, because of its weight, was the peculiar, barge-like craft used for shark fishing. He studied its heavy lines for a moment, hope flaring in his mind.

"Those war canoes," he gasped. "They ride pretty low in the water, don't they?"

"Yes," Leah said, puzzled. "Why?"

"And Carrell told me once the break in the reef is barely deep enough for an outrigger to cross . . ."

Elke nodded.

"When we went out fishing that time, I noticed that barge of yours is so wide it nearly scraped the coral going out. The damned thing must weigh a ton. If we sank it right in the middle of the passage . . ."

Elke was running for the beach even before he finished speaking. Wyatt was right on her heels. There was an axe in the small supply hut near the outriggers. She snatched it up and splashed through the light surf toward the moored shark fishing boat. Wyatt

joined her and hauled in the anchor. Together they began pulling the boat toward the reef.

When they reached the lapping waters above the coral shelf, the closest of the ornately carved, brightly painted Kawali canoes was less than 500 yards away. He could hear the shouts of the squat-featured, brown-skinned natives as they drove their paddles into the waves in perfect unison. While Elke struggled to hold their boat steady in the turbulent current at the mouth of the passage, Wyatt frenziedly swung the axe into the floor boards.

Crossbow arrows zipped through the air all around them. Grunting, Wyatt worked like a madman. Finally water started to trickle into the bottom of the boat.

"Wyatt! Damn you, Wyatt!" a growling voice shouted from the approaching canoe.

He flashed a glance upward, saw Carrell's gnarled, red-bearded face in the prow of the first canoe, like some ghastly figure-head.

Then water was swirling around their ankles, the boat settling into the passage.

"Head for shore," Wyatt yelled to the girl, diving overboard.

Even before they were halfway back to land, gunfire began pouring off the beach. Wyatt, stopped, treaded water for a few seconds. The first canoe was now entering the passage. In the first heart-stopping seconds, he thought that it would make it over their improvised barricade, now out of sight. Then the canoe's prow rose into the air like a rearing horse, its belly torn out, spilling natives like dominoes from a box. Some of them were dumped on to the reef itself, where the sharp coral shelves cut their flesh like giant razors. Others made it to open water, where they swam in confused circles or struck out for shore. He saw no sign of Carrell.

By the time Wyatt rejoined Elke and the other women, two more canoes had tried to make it through — and had ended up the same way as the first. Elke had split her girls into two parties. One concentrated its fire on the canoes while the other aimed at the dark, shaggy heads bobbing in the surf. The remaining native crafts had backed up in a tangled flotilla beyond the reef.

"Look!" Leah warned, indicating a group of about a dozen Kawalis running out of the surf a hundred yards down the beach. Rifles

swerved toward them but most of the bunch reached cover. Other isolated survivors from the wrecked boats were also making shore.

By the time the massed war canoes on the other side of the reef turned out to the open sea in defeat, more than a hundred lifeless forms were floating in the water. Only three of the island girls had been killed — all struck by spears or arrows from the handful of natives who had reached land. Among the dead women was Mai, impaled through the back by a feather-tufted spear.

Leaving six girls to cover the beach, the others fanned out to mop up the Kawali stragglers. It wasn't a hard task. Cut off from their fellows, terrified, the natives were soon reduced to little more than fleeing animals. For the rest of the day the crack of rifle fire echoed all over the island.

Wyatt and Elke found Ivor Carrell's body three miles up the beach. He had been chopped up so badly by Kawali bolo knives that even the strong-nerved blonde had to look away. Four dead natives, probably killed by the brawny Englishman in his last minutes, lay a few feet away.

"They must have turned on him, figuring he had deliberately led them into a trap," Wyatt muttered.

Afterward, Wyatt didn't feel quite the same about the island. There had been too much tragedy to sustain the illusion that he was living in a new Eden.

On February 23, 1937 — more than six months after he and Carrell came to Onahiu—a Dutch steamer anchored off the reef to trade with the islanders. Learning that the ship was going to Hong Kong, Wyatt arranged with the captain to work out his passage. Leah took the news of his departure with a fatalistic shrug but Elke, to his astonishment, broke into tears.

"I'll be back soon," he promised the women who gathered on the beach to wish him goodbye. At the time he meant it, but as matters turned out, he never saw Onahiu again.

The 40,000 dollars he had saved during his gun running days still waited for him in the Hong Kong Merchants Bank. With it, he opened a small importing company. A year later he married a British girl, the daughter of a prominent businessman in the city. The Wyatt firm, operated by his grandchildren, still exists today.

Although intermarriage with Asiatics has long since obliterated the almost purely Scandinavian bloodline of the Onahiu islanders, one thing hasn't changed at all. The portrait of mutton-chop-whiskered Gustav Borkman still hangs in the city hall of the town that has replaced the tiny village Robert Wyatt knew. Most of the islanders have forgotten the identity of the imposing man in the picture but it is still an object of veneration. ●

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YANKEE BUCCANEER

(Continued from page 13)

"Our problem is keeping a crew intact. River pirates have hit the boat hard and no one wants to sign on. My guess is the pirates are really rebel soldiers. The Heavenly King lets us go in, so he can steal from us."

"How about your captain?" Ward asked.

"He knows the river channels but he likes the bottle," the owner said disgustedly. "You'd have to be more than just a mate."

Fred Ward grabbed the job. He wanted to learn more about the rebel forces and working as mate on the sidewheeler was an open invitation behind enemy lines. He had been told the truth, but things were worse than he'd supposed. The steamer captain drank himself into his bunk before the cast off from the Shanghai dock, and he stayed there downing jug after jug. Jittery crewmen nervously shot wide-eyed glances at the forested riverbanks as they chugged upstream. Ward punched shells into a pair of .45 Colts, jammed the guns into his belt, stood on the bridge holding a cocked carbine.

Five miles up-river the steamer slowed for a bend, and a dozen flat-bottomed sampans skimmed toward it from concealment along the overgrown banks. The air was filled with whizzing arrows. Ward tugged a blast on the steamer whistle. Twelve of his Chinese crew came on deck, waving cutlasses and clubs — but ducked for cover. Ward's lone carbine spat rapidly, but was not enough to hold the sampans off. They zig-zagged in close, tossed up hooked ropes, and half-naked heathens swarmed over the side-railling.

Ward, legs braced for expected impact, drew his Colts and thumbed a barrage of shots at the pirates. Men staggered under that lethal blast, pitched from the railling, down into water or on top of other boarders climbing up. The volleying string of shots seemed to stun the pirates, and in the moment that they hesitated, Ward tore into the boarders, clubbing left and right with his empty pistols.

The sight of the slim foreigner falling away at the fearsome river pirates seemed to turn loose his timid crew. The 12 who had come to fight followed Ward to the railling, swinging heavy blades and clubs.

Ward raced upstairs to the bridge, seized the whistle cord, tugged hard. Shrieking blasts brought more of the crew to the deck. Seeing other crewmen still on their feet, the newcomers rushed into the scrap. They saw Ward dive off the bridge like an attacking tiger down on top of a pirate about to climb aboard. The pirate couldn't free his hands from the boarding rope, couldn't protect himself as Ward closed throttling fingers around his throat. Gasping for breath, his face turned purple, the pirate let go of the rope — and

Ward shoved him back into the river. When the head bobbed out of water, Ward drove a spear down into it.

The mate was at the railling, swinging a red-smeared cutlass, when the last of the raiders toppled back into the river. He sagged, completely exhausted, and watched the empty sampans drift away from the steamer, followed by floating corpses. "Heave the dead overboard," he gasped. "How did we make out?"

Two of the crew had been killed, one other was missing, most of them were wounded. Ward issued orders to the well and able, and with its whistle signalling a piercingly triumphant warning, the sidewheeler headed on up the river. Along the Yang-tze pirates and rebels soon learned about Fred Ward and let his steamer pass unmolested. In Shanghai persons of high importance heard stories of the daring American. His name began to be mentioned in the planning conclaves of wealthy Chinese merchants who were organising a privately sponsored resistance to the Heavenly King.

Shanghai was now in its most critical hour. The rebels had massed a large force at Sun-Kiang, just a few miles up the Yang-tze River. The imperial army protecting Shanghai was commanded by a general who was an opium addict, and the imperial governor of the city was a grafter suspected of taking the Heavenly King's money. Unwilling to rely on these men, the Merchants Patriotic Committee placed several well-armed gunboats into operation. One of these was commanded by Captain Charles Gough, an Englishman and waterfront cafe pal of Fred Ward. He immediately asked Ward to become his first mate aboard the gunboat.

Ward was glad to accept. Brawling up the Yang-tze on a lumbering, unarmed sidewheeler held little future — slashing into rebel territory aboard the gunboat *Confucius* promised real action. Teaming up with the second mate,

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lanky Tex Burgevine, Ward turned the *Confucius* into a pint-sized dreadnaught, blowing pirate and rebel junkies and sampans out of the water under heavy fire from shore gun positions. Reports from Captain Gough caused the merchants' committee to send for Ward. Mandarin Yan Tzetang, chairman of the committee and director of the fabulously wealthy Taki bank, interviewed the gunboat man personally. A middle-aged man with a shaved head, Tzetang appraised Ward cautiously. "You have military experience, Mr Ward?" he asked.

"Junior officer in the French army, ranks up to and including brigadier in five South American armies," Ward said.

"What do you know about the T'ai Pings—the rebels?"

"They fight with bows and arrows, spears, and an ancient type musket of tremendous calibre mounted on clumsy tripods," Ward said. "There is more courage than military skill."

Tzetang launched into a detailed description of the city of Sun-Kiang. It was fortified with walls 20 feet high, encircled by a guarded moat, garrisoned by 5000 rebels. The banker wiped perspiration from his bald head. "Could you capture it?"

"I'd need time to train my men and devise a tactical plan," Ward said. "Give me enough money and I'll give you Sun-Kiang, in about one month."

Tzetang shook his head "In a week, Mr Ward," he said. "A week?" Ward flared. "What the hell do you expect—miracles?" "The committee offers 200,000 dollars to anyone who can drive the rebels from Sun-Kiang in a week," Tzetang said. "We insist on an early attack to stall an impending rebel attack on Shanghai."

Ward wanted the 200,000 dollars and in the end he accepted

the banker's terms. "In a week I don't guarantee victory," Ward said furiously. "But we'll attack."

Ward roamed through the waterfront in search of fighting men. Those he considered excellent soldiers, he recruited into a special training force. The bums, the drunkards, and the drug addicts, he formed into a raiding party. He marched out, four nights after his talk with Tzetang, with a band of bawling, boozehounds, most of them staggering drunk, toward the heavily armed fortress at Sun-Kiang.

Whisky bottles shattered loudly in the night as they tramped along. The attackers broke into rollicking song. Ward, at the head of the double column, grimaced, hesitated — and marched them on. He knew that the outposts at Sun-Kiang were speeding messages back to the walled city. He expected that the rebels would be waiting for them — and he was right.

Heavily mounted muskets — and to Ward's surprise — powerful howitzers opened up on them in a blazing, earth-quivering barrage. Ward's men were shocked at the intensity of the defence. The singing broke off, bottles were hurled aside. In panic, the raiders hunted places to hide. Ward shouted a warning as rebel columns sped out of ambush, swept around them in an attempt to cut the raiders off from retreat. The drunkers sobered, the bums got ambition, the addicts became clear-headed. In a swashbuckling charge, they smashed through the rebel infantry, battered an opening, and fled down the banks of the river. Hours later, Ward marched his ragged survivors back into Shanghai. Defeat was etched on every dazed face and hung heavy upon each drooping shoulder. Tzetang, the Chinese banker, met his hired army at the gates of the city. "What hap-

pened?" he asked, dismayed. "We lost," Ward snapped. "Didn't you expect it?"

Jeers came from Shanghai residents and imperial army troops lining the streets as the defeated battalion limped into the city and each "soldier" slunk away to hide behind whisky or opium. Ward reported that 11 men had been lost in the night's action.

"Sun-Kiang must be taken or Shanghai is doomed," Tzetang told him. "You will try again?"

"In a month," Ward agreed. "I don't like leading lambs to the slaughter."

Overnight, Ward became the laughing stock of Shanghai, his heroic river exploits forgotten. Tex Burgevine, second mate on the gunboat *Confucius*, was the first to realise that the now silent Ward had no intention of being licked by public opinion. "I want you as my first lieutenant," Ward told the whiplash Texan. "We're going to train a striking force to capture Sun-Kiang."

Burgevine pounded Ward with a ham-like hand. "You know," he said, "I got a feeling you can do it—crazy as it sounds. Sure, you've just recruited yourself a lieutenant."

Ward commissioned him with a handshake. "Recruiting is our big job," he said. "I have a couple dozen good men lined up, but we'll have to sign on about 100 more at least."

The recruiting was not easy. The hard-bitten adventurers who packed the waterfront cafes of Shanghai had heard the stories of Ward's shattering defeat in Sun-Kiang, and laughed at them. They weren't going to be fools enough to join forces with a madman. Yet there was something in the way Ward looked at a man, the slightest derisive twist to his lips, hard direct words — that made the tough ones burn with determination to prove their worth on the field of battle. A big Filipino, half drunk on gin, decided to test Ward personally. He grinned at the other men lining the bar of a cheap joint. Then he put down his glass, spun gracefully, and drove into Ward with all the fury of an attacking lion.

Burgevine leaped to intervene, but Ward pushed the Texan aside, slipped nimbly away from the Filipino's rush, then moved in, his fists snapping to head and gut in a drumming barrage that slammed the man against the bar. Ward had to clip the big fellow half a dozen times to floor him. He peered up through glassy eyes, waved peacefully.

"No more, boss," he said, through bleeding lips. "Vincente fights with you, not against."

Ward and Burgevine hauled Vincente to his feet, Ward shouted for drinks, jammed a wad of money into the Filipino's hand. "You're the kind of man we need, Vincente," he said. "If you know any more as good as yourself, bring them to me. I'm making you a sergeant."

Vincente turned out to be Ward's best recruiter. In a week's

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time Ward had gathered his small army, the majority of them tough, burly Filipino men. In addition to Burgevine, Ward had enlisted an American named Pat Forrester, a soldier of fortune of much the same cut as Ward himself. Moving to a camp outside the city, Ward began his training program. He had fought in mountains, jungles and forests. His men were taught all the hard-won secrets of war Ward had picked up while battling in South America. Day after day men were washed out, discharged when they failed to meet Ward's exacting standards. During the third week, Ward announced to his officers that the striking force was set. There were 110 men, no more, and Ward had come up with a scheme that would enable them to capture a walled city garrisoned by 5000 rebel troops.

"Odds of nearly 50 to one," Ward said, "will call for a plan these monkeys never heard of."

Burgevine and Ward took several secret trips up the Yangtze River to study the city of Sun-Kiang. Gradually, his plan took shape. Three major objectives were three base howitzers located at separate points on the city wall. Three squads of six men each, led by Burgevine, Forrester and Ward would take these gun positions. "Sergeant Vincente will lead another party to the main gate and smash it open with a battering ram."

"They'll butcher us if we go through the gate!" Forrester protested.

"Right!" Ward said. "So we don't attack that way. Vincente's party will bash in the door, whoop it up, and fade out of sight. The main assault will come from another direction."

They waited for a moonless night. While they waited, the men built tall scaling ladders and a heavy battering ram. Each of them was armed with a rifle and bayonet, plus whatever other personal weapons they favored. On a night when fog settled over the Yangtze River, Ward and his officers led the striking force aboard slow-moving barges. An incoming tide carried them to a point south of Sun-Kiang, and Ward ordered the barges turned into the bank. This time there was no noise, no drunken revelry. One hundred and ten men crept forward in the darkness. One hundred and ten eased into the water of the moat around Sun-Kiang, without making a betraying splash. Swimming silently, they reached the base of the wall. Ladders were stealthily raised. Ward, Burgevine and Forrester took their squads into position. They were to strike first.

"When you hear the opening shot," Ward told Sergeant Vincente, "bust down the door."

Ward went up the ladder. He scrambled into the walltop, and was seen almost at once by a guard walking post. The guard opened his mouth, raised his rifle—and took a foot of cold steel through his heart. Ward motioned to move forward along the

wall. Their objective, the howitzer, pointed out over the Yangtze River toward Shanghai. Ward and his raiders eased up behind the gun crew, ran toward them at a signal, bayonets levelled.

Steel clashed on steel. Taken by surprise, their faces wide with fright, the gun crew was no match for the attackers. Ward cut down the crew sergeant with a slashing motion, turned, and fired his rifle at the cannoner. At the shot pandemonium broke loose. The night was filled with blood-curdling screams. A horde of wild Filipinos swarmed over the walls, leaping down on hapless guards. At the main gate, Vincente's squad used the battering ram, pounding it noisily, smashing down the wooden gates.

"Swing the howitzer," Ward shouted to his men when he saw a hastily formed rebel column begin to charge toward the main gate. The heavy weapon was trundled into a new position, powder and grapeshot were loaded in—the short-barrelled cannon belched flame and lobbed a heavy charge directly into the rebel ranks. Another howitzer boomed from the darkness. In a moment, Ward heard the thunder of the third gun.

Caught in a devastating triangle of artillery, swept over by savage, blood-crazed Filipinos, the rebel commanders and their men decided they were under attack by a tremendous force. The shouts, the loud but meaningless commands, sounded like more troops coming up from the rear. The order to retreat was given. In wild-eyed panic, half of them dropping their weapons, the rebel fighting men raced out of other gates and fled north along the Yangtze River. Ward followed them with artillery fire, stinging their tails. Inside the walls of the city, his Filipino warriors mopped up with bayonets and cutlasses. By dawn Sun-Kiang was won.

Ward lined up his men for review and complimented them on their brave victory. Forrester smiled at his commanding officer.

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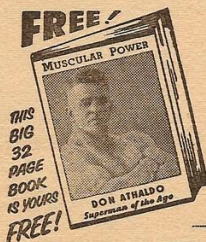
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"Ought to let me swipe a sword from one of those dead rebels," he said.

Ward was dressed in his blue mate's uniform, had on a tattered riding cap, and leaned on a twisted old rattan cane. He waved the cane at Forrester. "Sword wouldn't go with my uniform," he said. "I'll just use the cane, thanks. Better dismiss the men and post guards."

The capture of Sun-Kiang was

more of a victory than even Ward expected. With the troops in the river port, Shanghai no longer was under pressure of an immediate rebel attack. It was the first time the Heavenly King had tasted defeat, and the Merchants Patriotic Committee led by Mandarin Tzetang sensed that in Frederick Townsend Ward they had picked a winner. Tzetang himself turned over the prize money, 200,000 dollars, to the victorious soldier of fortune. "You are a hero to all China," Tzetang said. "We thank you beyond money." "All China?" Ward said in surprise.

Tzetang explained that Sun-Kiang was one of seven sacred cities in the Chinese empire. The Heavenly King and his rebel troops had desecrated the temples of Sun-Kiang. By driving him off, Ward had won the respect and admiration of the entire Chinese population. "You can have almost anything you desire," Tzetang said.

Burgevine chuckled when he, Forrester and Ward some time later, surrounded a bottle of whiskey. "Anything you desire," the Texan repeated. "Ever see Tzetang's daughter? I've heard that every young buck in the dynasty has his eye on her. But the old man keeps a close watch. Next time he gives you that 'anything you desire' business ask him for Tu Lili Tzetang."

"I might, I might," Ward said slowly. "But there's something I want more than that—if I'm not killed, I might get it. Prince—I think I'll be a prince of this country."

"To the prince," Burgevine shouted, and raised his glass.

With the toasting and the celebrating ended, Ward grimly set about the task of solidifying his position in Sun-Kiang and building his handful of gallant men into a formidable army. More recruits were enlisted, a new training program established. One of Ward's major triumphs during the summer of 1860 was the luring of four trained gunners from British warships into his small legion. "What we are training here," Ward told his officers, "is a corps of men who will be officers in the new Chinese army we will recruit once we have developed a full staff of commanders."

In a few months' time the halo over Ward's head disappeared, and the chairmen of the Merchants' Committee began to inquire about new attacks against the rebel forces. They mentioned the city of Tsing-pu, a stronghold of the Heavenly King which, though more distant than Sun-Kiang, represented a threat to the security of Shanghai. They insisted that Ward attack, immediately.

"Wait," Ward told them. "I am preparing to build my army which will drive the Heavenly King from China. Time is important, don't ruin things by demanding speedy action."

"We must have Tsing-pu," Mandarin Tzetang insisted. "Or we will withdraw financial support."

"I don't have enough men," Ward said. "Have you forgotten the first attack on Sun-Kiang—our defeat?"

"The Governor of Shanghai has ordered his general to support your attack with 5000 imperial troops," Tzetang said.

Ward could find no way out. He mustered his army, now 500 strong, and marched toward Tsing-pu early in February, 1861. Trailing him was the imperial division, with banners flying, Chinese firecrackers popping, and quavering voices raised in marching song.

"You ain't going in with those sapsuckers?" Tex Burgevine asked.

"I've been pushed into this attack," Ward said, "but we have arrangements made, don't worry. We can pretty well count on the imperials staying with us—*behind us*—but one morning they'll wake up and we'll be gone."

Ward's plan was similar to the victorious scheme that had won them Sun-Kiang. They were to be met at a point up-river by a small fleet of river barges, and would proceed to Tsing-pu as they had moved toward Sun-Kiang. Tsing-pu, Ward felt, would be ready for an attack and would be expecting the same tactics used against them before. "They have 10,000 men at Tsing-pu, headed by General Savage, an English officer who deserted for the Heavenly King's riches," Ward told his lieutenants. "Savage is no fool. Our lone hope is that our noisy buddies, the imperials, misled him into believing we're cocky enough to make a head-on assault."

"The first sound that isn't a firecracker is going to make the imperials turn tail," Burgevine warned.

Ward's grin was wicked. "I'm counting on General Savage. If he's half the boy I think he is, the imperials will be surrounded before they can run."

Ward discussed his plans for attack with the imperial general. He suspected the man was a drug addict, and wasn't sure all of his message got across. "Have your forces ready to attack just before dawn tomorrow. We will lead the way in. If you fail to see us, just keep moving forward. We may be inside the city by then."

An hour before the imperial army was to move out, Ward had his men awakened and took them silently down to the riverbank and aboard the barges. "Success depends on how far the general leads his men before he realises we aren't ahead of him in the field," Ward told Burgevine. "Keep your fingers crossed."

The Sun-Kiang attack was repeated to the letter. This time, Sergeant Vincente spearheaded a

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force armed with mobile howitzers. The signal shot was fired, Tsing-pu's walls were scaled and its defenders looked up in surprise as glaring-eyed madmen raced toward them. Vincente and his men caved in the main gates, a caravan of cannon rolled through, howitzers began to spit death at the rebels. Ward waved his cane, signalling a drive straight through the city to the far side. It was a tactical error, he realised this as soon as Pat Forrester reached his side with a message.

"The imperials have bolted!" Forrester yelled. "Savage is letting them go. He's bringing up a second army he had hidden in the woods."

Ward scaled a wall, amid spanging bullets and cannon shot, fixed glasses on a thick woods to the east of the city. From this point, he saw, came five columns of soldiers, a force of about 20,000 men!

Ward started down the ladder, doubled over in pain, fell to the ground. Blood drenched his coat-front, his mouth hung at a grotesque angle. He had been hit in five different places, and his jaw broken.

"We're trapped!" Forrester shouted. "What can we do?"

Unable to talk, Ward motioned with his cane to the west wall, jabbed the end sharply toward a rear gate of the city, swept it in a circling motion around in the direction of the wall. Battle-wise Forrester didn't catch the meaning at once, but he did the second time. "Get a stretcher!" Forrester ordered two Filipino rebels. "Carry the general—and watch his cane for commands."

Lanced with unbearable pain, handicapped by loss of speech, Ward was still enough of a soldier to take his small force to the rear gate, signal them to abandon the cumbersome artillery, and wave them around the west gate toward the river. Filipino soldiers held the west wall, allowing the main group to pass beneath it unmolested and rush for the barges hidden along the banks of the Yang-tze River. The major rebel attack, coming from the east woods, found itself cut off from Ward's raiders by the city of Tsing-pu. When General Savage finally analysed Ward's counter move, the evacuation was completed. A pair of howitzers left to guard the barges opened up, pounding the advancing rebel units and scattering them. Filipino snipers leaped from city walls to rejoin the main party at the barges.

Ward signalled the howitzer crews to stay behind to provide cover for the barge retreat. The gunners were to swim out once the barges were in mid-stream. Pat Forrester grabbed Ward's elbow. "Look, Fred," he said. "Look at the west wall!"

Ward struggled painfully to a half-sitting position, put his glasses on the wall where Forrester indicated. The barges were well offshore now, but Ward's face suddenly whitened with fear.

"No," he said. "No!"

A party of rebel soldiers stood on the wall, clustered around a tall, lean figure that could be only Tex Burgevine. The Texan was tightly bound, and from ankles to throat was swathed in wide strips of oil-soaked paper. A rebel officer raised a blazing torch high overhead. "They want us to see this," Forrester gritted through clenched teeth. "They're sore we're escaping. It's called a lamp of heaven—old Tex!"

The torch dropped, flame touched Burgevine's feet. A ball of crimson spouted up, consuming the oily paper, burning the Texan alive. Ward, five bullet holes spurting blood, sprang off his stretcher. More blood gushed from his flapping chin, broken bones splintered and cracked. He screamed in a strange, awful voice: "Get me a rifle—get me a rifle!"

The Filipino standing nearby didn't have a chance. Ward cuffed him, ripped the gun from his hands, knelt, aimed and fired. A rebel clutching a blazing torch pitched 20 feet off the west wall to the ground. Ward lurched to the side of the barge, got set to dive.

Forrester hit him under the knees in a leaping tackle. The stunned Filipino rolled over and sat on Ward's chest. He threw them off, was getting up, when half a dozen men smothered him, pinned him down. Sergeant Vincente leaned over Ward and drove a needle into his arm. "Sometimes," Vincente gasped, "drugs can be useful."

They held Ward to the deck of the barge until he fell unconscious.

Sun-Kiang and Shanghai were terror-stricken when the barges, bearing their super-hero among the wounded, docked at the river port and news of the terrible defeat was released. Only the imperial forces, whose cowardice was now known to all, stood between Shanghai and the destructive rebel might of the Heavenly King.

Ward was rushed to Shanghai for treatment and surgery. As his senses returned to him, Ward learned that the Merchants Committee had lost faith in him and turned to the imperial government in Peking for help.

When he returned to Sun-Kiang, Ward discovered that his able lieutenant, Forrester, had managed to keep the main force of his army intact. Sun-Kiang had only a week before been hit by the full weight of the Heavenly King's military might. But the valiant few, with a minimum of artillery at their command, had fought off the attack and held the city.

"There's no time to lose," Ward said. "Another attack may succeed. We're going to begin recruiting Chinese."

The best of his hard-core of Filipinos and American fighters were commissioned and placed in charge of raw, young Chinese loyalists. Ward imported fine rifles from Europe, amassed an arsenal



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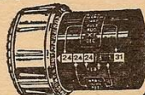
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of ammunition and powder, uniformed his men in smart greens, fed them well, paid them monthly, and slowly turned a herd of nervous, rebel-fearing Chinese into the First Chinese Regiment, 1000 strong. Ward was beginning to recruit men for his Second Regiment when the American Civil War broke out and its conflict reached clear to the China Seas.

The English at the outset of the war favored the Confederacy, and the British in Shanghai, outnumbered American five to one. British military and naval forces in Shanghai planned to seize American property and arrest all Yankees. Ward chilled them all, quickly. "On the day Americans are arrested," he said, "a fleet of sampans armed with crocks of ammunition will destroy any British ship in the harbor, and the Embassy and other British holdings will be bombed and destroyed."

Fortunately, Ward's threat was never triggered. American and British relations smoothed and early in 1862 the English announced they would stand behind the imperial cause in China. None other than Admiral James "Fighting Jimmy" Hope warned the Heavenly King to retreat from the Shanghai area. Defying the admiral's announcement, the Heavenly King sent a force, 10,000 strong, storming across the plains from Tsing-pu toward Shanghai. Smoke began to rise from the hills, evidence of plundering and destruction.

Ward's First Chinese Regiment swung into action. A powerful and mobile military unit, it smashed into the rebel forces and rushed them to shreds. A slim man on horseback, waving a cane, led the First Regiment's 1000 against the 10,000. The 10,000 fled, leaving hundreds of dead behind. "We'll light a lamp to heaven," Ward raged to Pat Forrester, "and the lamp will be the Heavenly King himself."

The Second Chinese Regiment, partially trained, was thrown into the field as Ward prepared to go all the way out. Admiral Hope, outraged at the rebels' defiance of the British ultimatum, organised a naval brigade, and was joined by a strong force of French sailors. Six thousand strong, Ward and his allies went after the fleeing rebels. For 30 miles around, Shanghai was cleared of rebel troops. The chase pressed the Heavenly King right to the walls of his stronghold, Tsing-pu, and spilled over into the city itself. A war of a fury probably never equalled in history was waged in and around Tsing-pu. Tens of thousands of rebels were slain by Ward's gallant forces, and the Heavenly King, his big punch broken, was forced to retreat inland. The French commandant was killed. Fighting Jimmy Hope took a bullet in the leg. Ward was shot twice, and bounced up again to lead his men on to victory. Tsing-pu was won.

The streets of Shanghai roared with traditional celebrations and

gay snake parades. From the capital, Peking, came an official designation for Ward's splendid fighting men — "The Ever-Victorious Army". Frederick Townsend Ward, Salem Yankee, was commissioned a Chinese Imperial General. Within an hour he was commissioned again, this time as an Imperial Admiral. The Emperor paid Ward an honor never before accorded a foreigner — he was made a Mandarin of the highest rank.

The wealthy banker, Tzetang, joyously presented the Mandarin Admiral General with his most valuable possession, his beautiful young daughter, Tu Lili Tzetang.

The marriage of Fred Ward to Tu Lili was one of those pre-arranged things, a matter of politics and business. There was no love involved, just a city-rocking ceremony, high-ranking officials bowing and hand-shaking, and finally, for the sake of tradition, the bride and groom were deposited in the bridal suite of a plush-lined hotel. She was young, shy, with quiet dark eyes, high-piled black hair, and a figure which remained a secret behind yards of China's finest silk. Fred Ward, age 30, was in the prime of his life, strong, healthy, aggressive.

"You're just a kid," he said to her, with an apologetic smile. "Where I come from we don't believe in this kind of thing. You take the bedroom, I'll sleep on the couch. Some day I won't come back from a battle. Then you can get yourself a real husband."

Lili had herself a husband, she had the catch of the century, and she wasn't going to let him slip away. China's finest silk was soon a carpet for her naked feet. She was an Oriental queen, beautiful enough for even a Salem Yankee.

Ward grinned, this time with no apology, and was moving toward the girl when ringing chimes signalled someone was at the door. "Damn that so-called Heavenly King," Ward said after he read a note passed inside to him. "A man can't even spend an hour with his wife."

The Heavenly King, furious at the defeats of his armies, had dispatched his top general toward Shanghai in a smashing strike aimed at taking the city and scattering all armed resistance into the hills. The rebels had smothered a huge imperial force and were rolling back, desperate, bold and in murderous rage.

Ward looked sadly at his lovely bride, shook his head, and left.

His Ever-Victorious Army, swelled by patriotic enlistments, was a mighty force of 10 regiments — 10,000 trained fighters. They were alerted in a moment's notice, and marched out to meet the rebel attack. English, French and imperial armies joined the forced march, and a new British expeditionary force, landed at Shanghai, was pressed into action at once.

The rebels fought like devils, and died. Ward's regiments broke the back of the southward drive,

hurled the raiders back, stamped on them, crushed them, chased them deep into China. When Ward rode back into Shanghai at the head of his Ever-Victorious Army, there was no bigger man in all China. The Dragon Throne was his for the asking.

"The emperor is dead," Forrester told him. "The Chinese people have wearied of the Manchu dynasty. They want a new emperor, a hero, and they have you. If you were to march north to Peking the imperial forces would flee, the throne would be yours."

"If I were to march north to Peking," Ward said, "the Heavenly Pig would march east to Shanghai. When I've wrapped him in oil-soaked paper and struck the match, then I'll think about the throne of China."

That autumn, 1862, Admiral General Fred Ward moved his Ever-Victorious Army out of Sun-Kiang toward the rebel capital at Nanking. A large imperial force trailed his advance but Ward had no need of them as he prepared to attack the last rebel stronghold standing between his armies and Nanking. This was the city of Tzeki, where Ward expected to encounter fierce resistance — that last desperate stand of the Heavenly King. Nanking itself would be a minor problem.

Ward's artillery, situated on high ground outside Tzeki, opened up with a barrage of shells to clear the way for infantry attack. Admiral-General Ward sat his horse before one of his regiments, watching an ornate timepiece he held in his hand. He raised the rattan cane — shook with unexpected violence, bent over, pushed erect in the saddle. "I'm hit, Forrester. Signal the advance!"

Pat Forrester helped Ward down off the horse, aided by a dozen anxious infantrymen. Blood bubbled on Ward's lips, flooded his shirtfront. "Caught a sniper's bullet," he whispered, and fell limp.

Forrester raised the rattan cane high, so every man along that silent, waiting line of bayonets could see. He swept it down and forward, toward Tzeki, in the signal to charge.

Filipino and American officers took their regiments into the city of Tzeki that warm day, September 20, 1862. It is recorded in history that the rebel forces withdrew in disorder. Charging Chinese regiments, in a crying rage, took Tzeki, washed its streets in rebel blood and swept on, unstoppable, until Nanking had fallen and the Heavenly King's bid to rule China was demolished.

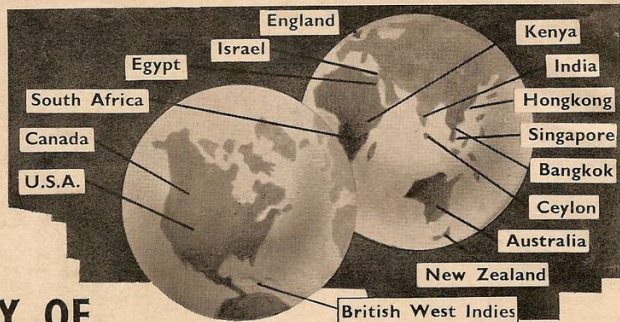
When the victors returned, battle-scarred and weary, they built a memorial shrine in the holy city of Sun-Kiang in honor of Frederick Townsend Ward, the Salem Yankee who nearly became Emperor of all China. It is known that incense was burned every day at this shrine, Ward's tomb, until the Bamboo Curtain of Red China shut off Sun-Kiang from the outside world.



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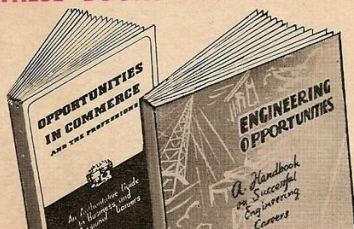
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